

# Sustaining Familial Relations in Technology Consumption: Confucian Values and Social Structure in Chinese Families

Master's Thesis  
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Marketing  
2017

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**Title of thesis** Sustaining Familial Relations in Technology Consumption: Confucian Values and Social Structure in Chinese Families

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**Degree** Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration

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**Degree programme** Marketing

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**Thesis advisor(s)** Sammy Toyoki, Jack Tillotson

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**Year of approval** 2017**Number of pages** 76**Language** English

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## Abstract

### Objectives

This study aims to give an interpretive account of technology consumption and foreground the cultural values and social structure in Chinese culture. The research context is television and video viewing in Chinese families. Current research on technology consumption lacks understanding of the sociocultural drivers and constructs and how the use of technology manifests these structures. In uncovering these perspectives from a cross-cultural approach, this study adds insights to consumer experiences of technology consumption and extends literature in the stream of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT).

### Methodology

To explore consumer experiences of television and video viewing, the present study follows the traditions of hermeneutic to gain an understanding of consumer meanings and pursue the cultural and social background in consumer narratives (Thompson 1997). In total 11 phenomenological interviews were conducted to gain descriptive accounts of consumers' "lived experiences." The interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Important excerpts related to the emerged themes were later translated into English and presented in findings.

### Findings

Through empirical findings, I present a framework that illustrates the tensions and the drivers of which Chinese consumers follow propriety in the dyadic relationships of parent-child and husband-wife. First, the tensions in the parent-child relationship arise from parents' wishes to maintain interdependence with their children and children's wants to pursue self-interests. In this type of relationship, the two roles are influenced by the Confucian ethics of filial benevolence and filial piety separately. Second, the tensions between husband and wife or cohabiting partner are evident in the maintenance of power dynamics. In this type of relationship, the subordinates conform to the rules established in the relationship to sustain intimacy and compromise their consumption choices to their counterparts. Meanwhile, subordinates also relieve themselves from the rules to regain momentary autonomy. The findings suggest future research of technology ideologies in the Chinese and other cultural contexts and further investigation in the relationships between technology consumption and broader institutional structure beyond family ties.

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**Keywords** technology, culture, Chinese consumers, Confucianism, television, family

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the following persons. The completion of this master's thesis would not have been possible without them.

First, I'd like to thank my thesis supervisors, Sammy Toyoki and Jack Tillotson, for their valuable advice and guidance. My discussion with Jack has helped me find the missing piece in this study. Thank you.

I'd also like to express my warm thanks to my supervisor and colleagues at work for the trust and support in me completing this thesis.

Special gratitude goes out to Lai Shihua, Susana, and people from Walki Group's Changshu office who kindly helped recruit interviewees in China.

Last but not least, the encouragement from Kasper, my family, and close friends has helped me find strengths and keep me going along this journey. I express my deepest gratitude for the love and the unfailing support from them.

Wan-Chien Tsou

22 April 2017, Helsinki

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigates how consumers utilize technology to manage and cope with interpersonal relations under the influence of sociocultural values and structures. Many scholars have paid attention to technology consumption and have studied Western discourses that shape ideologies of technology (Kozinets 2008), how they are exerted in mass-marketplaces (Giesler 2012; Thompson 2004), and how they influence consumer experiences (Fischer et al. 2007; Kozinets 2008; Mick and Fournier 1998; Tian et al. 2014). However, little research has focused on unveiling the cultural influences and social constructs that underlie technology consumption and how the use of technology manifests these structures. The context for this study is television and video viewing in Chinese families. I draw from research on technology ideologies and consumption, Confucian philosophy, and Chinese cultural values to add cross-cultural insights to consumer experiences of technology consumption. Through interpreting phenomenological interviews, I present a framework that illustrates the tensions and sociocultural drivers to sustain familial relations in the research context. Based on the empirical findings, I argue that technology consumption in Chinese families adds a new dimension to the ideological fields of the technology proposed by Kozinets (2008). Thus, I suggest that future research should further investigate technology discourses in the Chinese and other cultural contexts as well as further explore the relationships between technology consumption and broader institutional structure beyond family ties.

A review of prior research shows that studies in technology consumption focus on technology ideologies. Scholars have examined how cultural discourses and myths of technology shape into ideologies (Kozinets 2008) and how these discourses and myths are used to serve marketers' agenda in the marketplace (Giesler 2012; Thompson 2004). Building on cultural discourses, Kozinets (2008) identifies four technology ideologies manifested in consumer narratives. In understanding the natural health marketplace, Thompson (2004) argues that the technology metaphors are used to legitimize another myth that promises the healing power of nature. Giesler (2012) unfolds how the market of Botox Cosmetics builds its brand images to contradict and resolve the opposing technology ideology.

Some other studies have uncovered how consumer narratives exemplify different technology ideologies (Fischer et al. 2007; Kozinets 2008; Mick and Fournier 1998; Tian et al. 2014). While Mick and Fournier (1998) give accounts of the paradoxes consumers face in the use of everyday technologies, Kozinets (2007) observes the dynamic contradictions within and between ideologies. Studies of medical science and healthcare consumers reveal salient technophile ideologies in their narratives. For example, Tian et al. (2014) discover that chronic patients see information communication technologies as an enhancement of self-narratives that bring an empathetic view of chronic patients as well as enable a dialogue with the public. Fischer et al. (2007) find that cultural discourse on science and technology shape consumer cognition of self-efficacy on couples pursuing parenthood using assisted reproductive technologies.

Despite the extended interest in technology consumption in consumer studies, there remain limitations in existing research. First, few studies have focused on the influence of cultural and social constructs on technology consumption and how the use of technology manifests these structures. As reviewed in the previous paragraphs, current research on technology consumption mostly revolves around consumer ideologies and its impact. Indeed, Arnould (1989) sheds light on the historical and socioeconomic influences on consumer innovation and adoption in an African context, i.e. in the Niger Republic. His account of Nigerien consumers and society focuses on the innovation adoption process (see Gatignon and Robertson 1985) under sociohistoric changes. That said, it provides a limited view of technology consumption itself.

Second, the theories and empirical studies in technology consumption are grounded in the Western context, lacking an understanding of other cultures. The Western narratives of technology are mainly drawn from Gnostic and Romantic mythoi (Giesler 2012; Kozinets 2008; Thompson 2004). On the one hand, Gnostic mythos reflects the utopian myth and has facilitated the view of technology as the way to human and social betterment (Kozinets 2008; Thompson 2004). On the other hand, Romantic mythos is rooted in Edenic myth and has promoted the belief that technology is destructive to nature (Kozinets 2008; Thompson 2004). Both mythoi are rooted in the European history and culture. Independent from the Western mythoi, the Asian view on society and nature is founded on respects for the past, harmony

between nature and human, and maintaining social order and hierarchy (Goldin 2010; Mitter 2008; Yao 2000). This view is under the influence of the Chinese philosophy of Confucianism which still has its roots in the cultural value and belief system today (Faure and Fang 2008; Fan 2000; Leung 2008; Yau 1982).

## 1.1 Research Objective

This study aims to foreground the cultural influences and social structure of Chinese culture and give an interpretive account on technology consumption. More specifically, I have chosen the context of television and video consumption in Chinese families for two reasons. First, television and video viewing as a mundane consumption pattern give a suitable ground for studying social interaction (Kleine, Schultz-Kleine, Kernan 1992). Second, familial relations are the basis of an individual's interpersonal relationships as well as networks of social ties. The pivotal Chinese philosophy of Confucianism especially emphasizes this notion (Goldin 2010; Yao 2000). Through studying the consumption experiences of television and video viewing in Chinese families, I intend to examine the relationship between technology consumption patterns and the underlying sociocultural structure and drivers (Arnould and Thompson 2005). That said, the research objective of this study is to address this question:

*How does technology consumption manifest Confucian values and social structure in the context of television and video viewing in Chinese families?*

Addressing this question through empirical investigation, this study extends the literature on technology consumption in the stream of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). The research findings underline the tensions and the drivers of which Chinese consumers follow propriety in the dyadic relationships of parent-child and husband-wife. Thus, this study contributes to uncovering the sociocultural influences and structure embedded in technology consumption patterns from a cross-cultural approach (e.g. Arnould 1989; Bonsu and Belk 2003; Joy 2000). Findings show that Confucian centrality on relationship-dependence and social order penetrates mundane consumption patterns. Contrary to studies that unfold the paradoxes and contrasting ideologies in consumer narratives of technology consumption



(Kozinets 2008; Mick and Fournier 1998; Tian et al. 2014; Thompson 2005; Fischer et al. 2007), the empirical data does not demonstrate consumer paradoxes. Rather, Chinese consumers mitigate tensions in their interpersonal relationships and fulfill duties imposed by their respective social roles through technology consumption. Lastly, the findings add to a cross-cultural understanding of technology consumption in the Asian context. Previous research on technology consumption premises on the Western myths of Utopia and Eden (Thompson 2004). This study foregrounds the prevailing Asian philosophy of Confucianism and argues that the Confucian worldview of human-nature harmony situates in the liminal space between Techtopian and Green Luddite ideologies set forth by Kozinets (2008).

Technology has become imperishable in consumers' everyday lives. Technology is pervasive in the day-to-day communication and how consumers spend time. Mick and Fournier (1998) find that the use of technology can bring paradoxical social consequences to interpersonal relationships. For example, spending time in front of the television and binge-watching TV shows may alienate oneself from spending time with others. However, if the latest season of the TV series, *Game of Throne*, is a popular topic in one's social network, he or she will not be able to participate in the conversation without having watched the series. Thus, watching TV shows may help one assimilate to one's social network and in social situations. In a world overloading with information, media, and buzzing phones, it is increasingly important to gain a multifaceted understanding of technology consumption. As a result, the present study strives to shed light on consumers' technology use and its role in interpersonal relationships.

To generate texts of consumer experiences of technology consumption, in-depth interviews are key sources to obtain descriptive accounts of their "lived experiences" (Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1989; Thompson 1997). Extracting consumers' description of "lived experiences" enables the researcher to understand consumption meanings and to pursue the value and belief systems in the cultural and sociohistorical frame of reference expressed in consumer narratives (Thompson, Pollio and Locander 1994; Thompson 1996; Thompson 1997). Thus, I follow the traditions of hermeneutics (Thompson 1997) to analyze and interpret consumer narratives generated from phenomenological interviews (Thompson et al. 1989). This approach allows me to address the research question through arriving at a

holistic understanding of consumer meanings, values, and beliefs and drawing out the underlying cultural and social influences and constructs (Thompson 1997). In total eleven in-depth interviews were conducted to generate consumer stories of their experiences of television and video viewing in Chinese families.

## 1.2 Thesis Structure

The rest of this study is divided into six chapters.

In Chapter 2, I give a literature review on the current research on technology consumption, television and video consumption, and television and video consumption in China. Then, a summary of the theoretical background is given.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the contextual background of the research context. I first give a brief overview of the history of Modern China and its cultural changes and introduce Confucianism. Then, I review research on Chinese cultural values, Chinese consumers, and “face consumption.” I also summarize the contextual background at the end of this chapter.

In Chapter 4, I explain the study methods. Research approach and justification for the methodology. Descriptions of the data collection procedure and analysis process then follow.

In Chapter 5, I present the findings and a framework that answers the research question. In Chapter 6, I highlight the main findings and reflect them in the literature. I conclude the study in Chapter 7 and discuss the limitations of this study and implications for future research.

## **2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The objective of the study is to answer the question: how does technology consumption manifest Confucian social structure and values in the context of television and video viewing in Chinese families? The context of television and video consumption is chosen because it has been a ubiquitous consumption pattern since early 1980's in China (Zhang 2009). Thus, television and video viewing as a mundane consumption pattern give a suitable ground for studying social interaction (Kleine, Schultz-Kleine, Kernan 1992). Thus, I build a theoretical background on technology consumption in Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) as well as giving an overview of television and video consumption literature.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In Section 2.1, I review consumer research on technology consumption. Following that, I review studies on television and video consumption in the fields of consumer studies and mass media and communication studies in Section 2.2. Lastly, I briefly look at television and videos consumption in China and the behaviors of Chinese audience in Section 2.3. I end this chapter by summarizing the literature in Section 2.4.

### **2.1 Technology Consumption**

Technology has always had a significant impact on consumers and how they consume. Technological innovations bring efficiency not only to production but also the generation and dissemination of new ideas and new technologies (see Dickson 2001). While the industrial machines had improved production efficiency, the innovations of trains, aircraft, and prints make the transmission of knowledge and ideas possible. Such technologies change the value chains of production, and ultimately consumer behaviors (Dickson 2001). Many scholars in consumer research field have critiqued, observed and diffused the consumption of technology.

Pertaining to the recent century, the Internet has been one of the most crucial technologies that digitalized and transformed the sites and process of consumption as well as the consumers (Lehdonvirta 2012). Revisiting the theory of extended self, Belk (2013) argues

that digitalization affects how the self is extended into the digital space, influencing the construction, management, and representation of the self. Digital consumption also empowers consumers to distribute goods, make consumption choices with higher bargaining power, and to be prosumers who participate in the production process as well as the consumption practice (Lehdonvirta 2012). Proconsumer refers to individuals who are involved in “*both* production and consumption rather than focusing on either one (production) or the other (consumption)” (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010, p. 14). Technology proconsumption, in this view, drives a new form of capitalism that gives more power and control to proconsumers. Thanks to the World Wide Web, there are more opportunities for proconsumption with no time and space limits. The Internet has facilitated the means of proconsumption. It has also given proconsumption popularity in consumer lives with media, such as blogs, video sharing sites, open-sourced software (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). For example, fashion bloggers producing information and displaying their taste online acquire cultural capital in mass that can be turned into economic capital by gaining revenue from their work (McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips 2013).

Some others argue that consumption of technological products or services also brings social progress. Fischer, Otnes, and Tunacy (2007) posit that the cultural trust in technology and science i.e. scientific rationalism is the product of technology and science progress since the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Consumers’ faith in technology and science reflects the discourse of that technology that brings forth human improvement and progress (Kozinets 2008). For example, consumers of child conception medicines are encouraged to privilege medical technology to keep striving for goals of parenthood (Fischer et al. 2007). In healthcare, patients with chronic disease envision digital innovation to inspire and bring positive change to the health care system and an empathetic view of the suffering patients (Tian et al. 2014).

More than viewing technology as a transformative and an empowering force to the consumption society, technology consumption may add emotional value to consumers. Technology-enabled entities, such as social media and virtual possessions, are agentic actors constructing, enhancing, and actualizing consumer emotions, like desires and fantasies (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2013; Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman 2016). Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2007; 2010a; 2010b; 2013) argue that technology

stimulates consumers' imaginations and actualizes their fantasies and desire in the digital virtual space on the Internet. Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010*b*) put forth digital virtual consumption (DVC) that exists in the liminal space between material (e.g. physical goods) and virtual (e.g. fantasy, imagination) worlds. They argue that DVC is the space where consumption practices focus on "emotional value, sign value and experiential playful experience" (p. 110). Thus, fantasies and daydreams are possible consumption input which can be actualized or stimulated by DVC practices, such as online shopping and video gaming. In their view, the digital virtual spaces enabled by the Internet transform consumption practices and its forms of pleasure and experiences. The consumption experiences may be even more "dramatic and exciting" than the "high street and shopping malls" (Molesworth and Denegri-Knott 2007, p. 131).

While the digital virtual space can have a dramatic turn on the consumption experience, the digital virtual can also enhance consumer's desire to consume (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013; Kozinets et al. 2016). Denegri-Knott and Molesworth's study in 2013 finds that consumer desire can be "rationalized" as a result of software-human hybrids of desire. These hybrids include software as a nonhuman agent that desire on behalf of humans; it, thus, makes consumer desire delegated and more manageable (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013). Also viewing technology as agentic, Kozinets et al. (2016) rejects "rationalized desire" and argue that technological entities promote transgressive extremes. Nonetheless, these studies agree that the meaning of technology consumption is for the purpose of emotional fulfillment.

From the review above, it is evident that the discourse on technology in consumer research centers on social change, empowerment, and self-actualization. This discourse is in alignment with Kozinets (2008) and his ideological field of technology. He proposes a model of four technology ideologies that are dynamic and paradoxically influence consumer narratives: Techtopian, Green Luddite, Work Machine, and Techspressive. The Techtopian ideology sets forth technology as the driver of human progress. Contrary to the Techtopian rhetoric, the Green Luddite ideology focuses on the natural, traditional way of life. The Work Machine ideology manifests economic growth, personal empowerment, wealth and success in technology. The Techspressive ideology articulates the fulfillment of pleasure, play, and self-

gratification onto meanings of technology. Contrary to consumer narratives, scholars more often occupy a clear position to support their theses. For example, Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010), on the one hand, see that technology centralizes proconsumption and creates new proconsumption capitalism. They use the Work Machine ideology which sees technology consumption as an economic driver. On the other hand, Belk (2013), Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2007; 2010a; 2010b), and Kozinets et al. (2016) position technology consumption gives consumer agency of self-expression and experience of pleasure.

Ideology is systems of beliefs and values that channel and emulate consumers' thoughts and actions held by a particular social group or class (Hirschman 1993). The ideologies of technology are mainly drawn from Gnostic and Romantic mythoi (Giesler 2012; Kozinets 2008; Thompson 2004). Both mythoi are rooted in the European history and culture. On the one hand, Gnostic mythoi, reflecting the utopian view, have facilitated the view of technology as the way to social progress and human betterment (Kozinets 2008; Thompson 2004). On the other hand, Romantic mythos has promoted the technology view of technology alienates nature (Kozinets 2008; Thompson 2004). This view is well related to the Edenic myths of human falling from Eden, marking human's alienation from nature (Thompson 2004).

Kozinets (2008) argues that ideology gives consumers a strong sense of personal and social identity which is manifested in consumer narratives. In consumer narratives on technology consumption, Kozinets (2008) observes the dynamic and contrasting ideologies consumers were influenced under. Similarly, consumer studies exhibit contrasts within and between technology ideologies. For example, the contradiction between the social progress, i.e. Techtopian and the detriment to the nature, i.e. Green Luddite ideologies is salient in rhetoric of natural health marketplace (Thompson 2004), Botox Cosmetic marketplace (Giesler 2012), natural childbirth (Thompson 2005) and healthcare for patients with chronic disease (Tian et al. 2014). Medical science consumer narratives also exhibit internal tension within the technology ideology of social progress (Tian et al. 2014; Fischer et al. 2007).

Also, examine the ideological forms technology consumption, Mick and Fournier (1998) found that specific technological products evoke salient paradoxes. For example, the

assimilation versus isolation paradoxes are associated with some entertainment products, especially television. Informants in their study cognize this paradox in which having the television on can be a hindrance (isolation) or a facilitator (assimilation) to social occasions. Television is also linked to freedom/enslavement paradox where it offers a wide range of entertainment options (freedom) whereas the range of choices also can be addictive (enslavement). Mick and Fournier (1998) argue that consumers are able to use multiple coping strategies, whether avoidant or confrontative, to deal with salient technological paradoxes.

## 2.2 Television and Video Consumption

Academics in the field of consumer research and communication studies have inquired into television and video viewing from the perspectives of its effect: socialization (Churchill and Moschis 1979; O'Guinn and Shrum 1997; Shrum, Burroughs, and Rindfleisch 2005), consumer interpretation of media text (Ang 1985; Hobson 1982; Kim 2005; Ritson and Elliot 1999), motivation (Lee and Lee 1995; Katz and Foulkes 1962; Vorderer 2001; Vorderer, Klimmt, and Ritterfeld 2004; Zillmann 1988a; 1988b), and television uses in social contexts (Jerslev 2001; Kim 2006; Perterra 2009). In the following paragraphs, I give an overview of the fields and open up the topics.

Television and videos have inarguably become pervasive in the lives of modern consumers. In China, people are spending 2.6 hours per day on watching all kinds of video entertainment, including television, video clips and mobile videos (eMarketer 2011). The effect of so much television viewing is indeed found to be related to how viewers see the world around them. In consumer studies, researchers regard television as an impactful agent of socialization (O'Guinn and Shrum 1997), most of which from a positivist view. Television viewing is found to affect the perception of affluence around the constructed reality (O'Guinn and Shrum 1997) and the viewer's material value (Shrum et al. 2005). Such effect suggests that television viewing process "invisibly" influences consumer's perception and values which result from the acquisition of social information of television viewers. The audience who are heavy viewers and who engage more i.e. pay more attention, elaborate while viewing during the process are influenced more (O'Guinn and Shrum 1997; Shrum et al. 1998).

The notion of television viewing as a “zombie-like” activity which makes viewers “couch potatoes”, staring at the screen mindlessly, is a biased view. As mentioned earlier, the effect of socialization has more effect on viewers who engage more. Also, scholars have argued that consumers actively interpret the text generated from television programs and advertising in their daily lives. In feminist studies, Hobson (1982) argued that females follow soap opera to create space for enjoyment in their household activities and actively create meanings and construct an understanding of the storyline. The narratives on television screens not only project the ideology of pop culture but also define the self-identity of viewers’. On the one hand, women critically define self-identify through resisting and subverting from the dominant ideology from TV program (Ang 1985; Kim 2005). On the other hand, the narratives of TV characters also serve as a vehicle for self-projection from the good-and-evil duality from television onto the complex life decisions in real life (Hirschman 1988). Advertising text is also viewed as a cultural product which carries meanings which are interpreted in a contextualized social world (Ritson and Elliot 1999). However, Ritson and Elliot (1999) argue that there is a need to distinguish the social use of text emerging from different texts, such as the one in the mundane and repetitive advertisement genre versus television programs.

Although much of the discourse of television has focused on the potential effects it has on viewers, the reason why people consume television or video content is largely overlooked. Scholars in the communication and mass media field have conceptualized the motivations of people seeking entertainment of mass media consumption. Scholars have argued that the use of mass media is motivated by “escapism” (Katz and Foulkes 1962) and mood management (Zillmann 1988a; 1988b). Consumers escape from the dysfunctions of everyday life into the media world where an individual make retreats (Katz and Foulkes 1962). First, Katz and Foulkes (1962) argued that the “escapism” motivation can result from two levels of media consumption: symbolic dimension i.e. what content is consumed, spatial-temporal dimension i.e. where and when media is consumed. Second, Zillmann (1988a; 1988b) put forth that the choice of entertainment or any communication premised on the notion that an individual values hedonism and strives to perpetuate a positive mood. Thus, individuals select entertainment to enhance their wellbeing and the overall entertainment experience (see Vorderer et al. 2004). Both theories, however, do not explain the context itself and the specific use of television viewing.



There are also attempts to find out why people are watching television through quantitative measures. For example, Lee and Lee (1995) have found that mood elevation and social pleasure derived from talking about television with others motivate television viewing behavior. Henning and Vorderer (2001), who built on the theory of escapism, argue that individuals who enjoy and engage in “thinking” are not motivated to watch television for entertainment. The opposite also holds true. This is termed, by Henning and Vorderer (2001), *individual-psychological escapism* (p. 103), a concept that explains the individual differences for the need of cognition, i.e. need to “think” and reflect own thoughts, and their media usage. Interestingly, the authors did not find a significant correlation between sociological escapism. The negative correlation means that work and life experiences have limiting effects on media use and the amount of viewing. Katz and Foulkes’s (1962) have objected to the causal relationship of the “drive” to escape and “exposure patterns” to media (387). Indeed, the alienated and the lonely do not necessarily turn to media (i.e. television) to escape from reality, but rather they turn to television to fill idle moments from their lack of interpersonal relationships (Perse and Rubin 1990).

To understand the contexts of television viewing in the social world, Lull (1980) famously outlined a framework for television use, a typology of Social Uses of Television. In this typology, he distinguishes the two main aspects in an individual’s life that television viewing has an influence on structural and relational aspects. The framework explains partially how television viewing can be sensory stimuli that enhance the environment one is in, a function that facilitates communication, a way to affiliate or avoids interpersonal relationships and a way for socialization. Lull’s exploration and inclusion of context around television use lack further explanations for individual meaning and motivation.

Perhaps the efforts of various communication researchers would lead to a glimpse of light on understanding why people watch television or video the way they do. For example, Jerslev (2001) describes a specific practice of youth culture in Denmark, where youth excessively watch videos together. The video watching forms temporary but effective connections. Kim (2006) posits that the television experience of Korean women centralizes on their emotional quest to find intimacy with their marriage in everyday life. Pertierra (2009)

argues that video consumption using or owning video cassette recorders in a post-Soviet Cuba is both “an act of reclaiming domesticity” (p. 122) and a symbol of economic disparity.

## 2.3 Television and Video Consumption in China

Television broadcasting has been an ideological vehicle for the government in Mainland China, People’s Republic of China (PRC). Television as media is regulated by the state in which television broadcasting follows a strict hierarchal system that is dominated by the national network, China Central Television (CCTV). Since the establishment of CCTV in the 1950’s, the national network has been “a mouthpiece for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), an ideological vehicle through which was advocated continuous political movements”, such as the Great Leap Forward in 1959 and the Cultural Revolution in 1966 to 1976 (Hong, Lü, and Zou 2009, p. 40). As the economy struggled during and after the Cultural Revolution, PRC opened up the market to the global economy under the economic reform led by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980’s. CCTV had also undergone several changes since the reform, some including the relaxation of the political control, the adjustment of programming content, and the increased channels (Hong et al. 2009). However, as Hong et al. (2009) criticize, the changes do not mitigate CCTV’s function to serve the communist party and its priority. As Curtin (2007) notes, the party perceives those satellite channels that can by-pass the state control to be a direct challenge to its supremacy and banned the private ownership of satellite dishes thus the party promotes cable TV.

The economic reform, in the long term, brought about economic growth and increasing per capita income in urban cities. It influenced the value and impact of the television market, reflecting in the ownership of TV set. In Chinese households, the ownership of TV has increased to a 94 percent penetration rate in 2002 i.e. 1.15 billion viewers, comparing to 73 percent in 1987 i.e. 590 billion viewers (Zhang 2009). More television channels have also been established. CCTV has increased from 1 to 16 channels over the years, and the other provincial channels have also flourished (Hong et al. 2009). The high penetration rate of television sets and the increase in television channels directly influence the role of television in people’s media consumption. Zhu and Berry (2009) even go as far to state that “far more

Chinese people are watching Chinese-language television every day as are reading novels or going to movie theaters” (p. 4).

Television has been highly praised as a symbol of modern civilization (Zhang 2009). Under strict media and content censorship from the PRC government, it is not surprising that television is utilized in serving political purposes (Hong et al. 2009). It is critiqued that the negative impacts of television viewing have been paid little attention to (Zhang 2009). In Zhang’s (2002) quantitative study on the Chinese television audience, he reports that not only is television viewing a core activity in a family setting, television viewing is also practiced among family members to enhance bonding and improve familial relationships. In the study, 20.2 percent of the respondents report that watching television has negative impacts on family relations. However, more than half of the respondents do not believe that it hurts family relations at all (Zhang 2002). With little negative discourse on television viewing and its role in the Chinese household, no wonder Zhu and Berry (2009) claim that Chinese people spent most of their leisure time watching Chinese-language television instead of reading books.

Since the advent of the Internet, the shift from traditional television to digital media has taken place as a global phenomenon. In China, digital video consumption is largely based in the form of movies and series instead of news, music or user-generated videos. As seen in Table 1, domestic movies, series, and variety shows along with foreign movies and series are the top 5 content types consumed by online video viewers (iResearch 2015). Indeed, time spent on consuming digital media has surpassed watching television since 2013, becoming the media people spent the most time on (eMarketer 2011). However, consumers in China are still spending as much as 3 hours, including digital videos and 2.5 hours on traditional television in a day (eMarketer 2017). China Internet Network Information Center (2016) reports half billion online video viewers. This accounts for 38 per cent of the total population. The increased time spent on online video viewing implies that online videos that can be viewed on mobile devices individually may challenge traditional television viewing that is widely regarded to be a family bonding activity. For example, the individual family member may replace the time spent with family watching television in a shared space to watching mobile video alone in a private space. The implication of the rise of online video influencing Chinese family relations is still an open question.

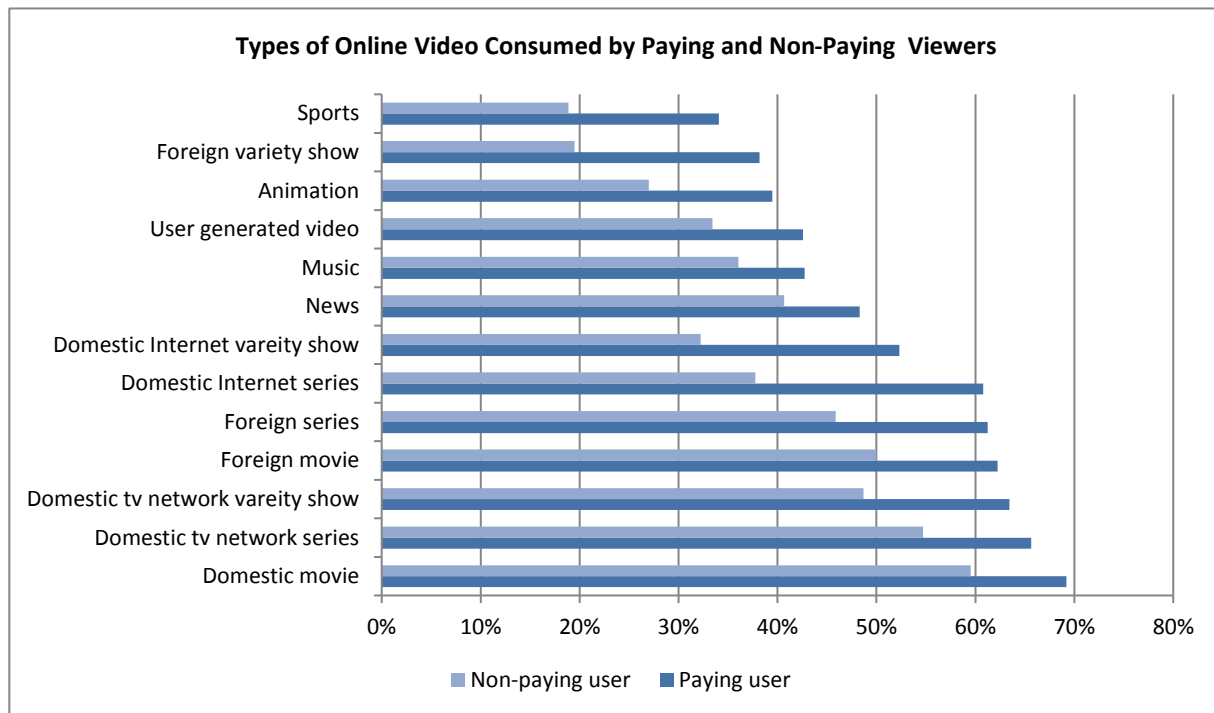


Table 1. Types of Online Video Consumed by Paying and Non-Paying Viewers (iResearch 2015)

## 2.4 Summary

Studying how consumers uphold Confucian values and social structure using technology consumption, I build the theoretical background on technology consumption as well as television and video consumption. I also outline television consumption and Chinses audience in the studied context. This section summarizes the literature reviewed in this chapter.

In consumer research, academics overall presume that technology brings social progress (Lehdonvirta 2012; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Otnes, and Tunacy 2007), drives capitalism (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010), and fulfill experiential desire (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2013; Kozinets et al. 2016). These discourses on technology fit Kozinets’s (2008) ideological fields of technology: Techtopian (technology consumption brings social progress), Work Machine (technology consumption as an economic engine), Techspressive (technology consumption fulfills pleasure). Other scholars have also studied the cultural discourses of technology that shape marketplace ideologies and how they are exerted

in mass-marketplace (Giesler 2012; Thompson 2004). Similar to Kozinets (2008), other studies have also unveiled the influences of ideologies on consumers (Fischer et al. 2007; Mick and Fournier 1998; Tian et al. 2014). While Kozinets's (2008) informants express conflicting ideologies of technology consumption in their narratives, few studies also shed light on these consumer paradoxes toward technology (Fischer et al. 2007; Thompson 2004, 2005; Tian et al. 2014). Mick and Fournier (1998) found that television consumption imposes paradoxes that both inhibit and facilitate social interaction (i.e. assimilation versus isolation) as well as offering more choices and making it addictive (i.e. freedom versus enslavement). However, their studies have given little account to television and video consumption.

Looking into research on television consumption, it is not hard to notice that much of the discussion revolves around its often negative impact on consumer perception (Churchill and Moschis 1979; O'Guinn and Shrum 1997; Shrum, Burroughs, and Rindfleisch 2005), motivation of television use driven by psychological coping mechanism (Katz and Foulkes 1962; Vorderer 2001; Zillmann 1988a; 1988b). These researchers imply that television use not only brings a negative impact but is also driven to ignore dysfunctional life aspects or to fill in the hollow interpersonal relationships. Opposite to the later view, the use of television can affiliate social relations in contexts, such as teenager gathering (Jerslev 2001) physical contact between married couples (Kim 2006). However, studies conducted that adopt this view are rather scarce.

Television consumption in China has not been studied much regarding its negative impact. It may be a consequence of the symbolization of television to modern civilization (Zhang 2009). With tight media control, television has always been a mouthpiece for the communist party to serve its political agenda (Hong et al. 2009). Besides the negative impact, the strong emphasis on family values in Chinese culture may give new insight to television viewing. For example, Zhang (2009) surveyed Chinese consumers and found that watching television is largely believed to be able to improve family bonding and that watching television is not hurtful to family relations at all. The survey results also give an interesting ground for this research to study further how social relations are sustained or improved in the context of Chinese family watching television.

### 3 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Culture has many definitions. Of the many definitions of culture, it is referred to as “collective programming of the mind” that distinguish one from another (Hofstede 2001), the “lens through which human sees the phenomenal world” and the “blueprint of human activity” (McCracken 1986), and basically a “complex whole” (Tylor 1881 as cited in Craig and Douglas 2006). However, I find the view of Geertz Clifford (1973, p. 28) on culture most compelling:

*“Becoming human is becoming individual, and we become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meanings in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives.”*

“Becoming human” is to become socialized beings that act, think, and see the social world around us. In this social world, culture separates humans into “single species” and shapes us as individuals. Becoming an individual is to be a particular kind of man of which there are different meanings and ways of becoming in different societies (Clifford 1973). Thus, culture is minds, lens, blueprint, guidance through which we become individuals, rather than a collective whole. This view resonates well with the ontological assumption of the research objectives. Thus, this chapter gives an overview of the contextual background of this study to introduce the cultural patterns and systems of meanings that shape the individuals in the research context.

China is defined as a highly collectivist culture in Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede 2001). The system of values and meanings in Chinese societies are inherently under the moral codes of Confucian relations. Confucianism centers on the concept of self-cultivation and becoming an ethical human. Although other philosophies, such as Taoism, Buddhism, and other regional cultures have formed the Chinese culture, Confucianism is undoubtedly the most influential one which underlies the social behavior and interaction of culturally Chinese people (Fan 2000; Hofstede and Bond 1988; Hofstede 2001; Hwang 2001; Mitter 2008).

This chapter introduces the research context of Confucianism and the Chinese culture in the following sections. In Section 3.1, I briefly review the history of modern China and the

historical events that have shaped China as we know it today. In Section 3.2, I introduce Confucianism: its origin, its thinking on being an ethical human being, and the social hierarchy. This is followed by reviewing studies on Chinese culture, discussing modern Chinese cultural value and belief systems in Sections 3.3. I then look at how cultural values affect Chinese consumers in Section 3.4. Lastly, I summarize this chapter in Section 3.5.

### 3.1 A Brief Look at Modern China

Chinese culture spans across thousands of years, across different geographical areas and ethnicities. Having a thorough discussion of Chinese culture within the timespan of the ancient imperial China to the modern China would be out of the scope of this study. Instead, the focus will be on the historical events that mark the political and social changes and the becoming of modern China.

Modern China marks the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the collapse of the last emperor of the Imperial China, an era that lasted thousands of years. Modern China and the Chinese culture is “a complex mixture of indigenous social influences and customs and external influences, often, but not always, from the West” (Mitter 2008, p.19). The serial wars waged between the Qing dynasty, the last emperor’s dynasty, and some Western nations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century opened China to the European political thoughts that rebut hierarchy and social order under the sovereignty of the Qing emperors. The introduction of European political ideologies has contributed to the political discussion of nationalism and the declaration of a republic state, the Republic of China (ROC) and the nationalist party, Kuomintang, in 1912. During the sovereign of ROC in China, May Fourth was a significant cultural shift toward democracy, science, the progress that denounced the Confucian thoughts and old culture. During this period, different political ideologies were introduced, such as Marxism, communism, and nationalism. The conception of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was under the emergence of communism in the May Fourth period (Mitter 2008).

Under the turmoil of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the two World Wars (1914-1918, 1939-1945), the ROC eventually retracted to Taiwan after a lost war against the CCP in

1950. The CCP and its founding leader, Mao Zedong, took power in China and declared the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Mao's communist ideology set its core on class warfare that aimed to reform social relations through a violent revolution that overthrows the ruling class. He made himself an authoritarian figure of the PRC through the political campaigns, like the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution during the 1960's and 1970's idolized Mao and propagandized modernity to a violent extreme. Rooting in the ideas of shattering the past and renewing a self-aware society, the government and the public abominated and oppressed intellectuals and destroyed the books that represented the past, such as Confucianism. However, the Cultural Revolution ended soon as Mao passed away. Shortly after Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping was made the new leader of the communist party. Deng declared an economic reform and designated Special Economic Zones that would attract foreign investment along the coastal cities in 1987. This economic reform marked the beginning of the Chinese market economy and its transformation to a consumer society (Mitter 2008).

Looking back at the history of modern China and its becoming, there has been a constant rejection of the old Chinese empire and ideas that perpetuate its sovereignty, for example, Confucianism. The historical events have indeed had an impact on China's sociocultural values (Faure and Fang 2008). However, Confucianism education has been promoted by the PRC government over the past decade. Since 2004, China has opened hundreds of Confucius Institutes globally (The Economist 2014). This effort signifies the attempt to revive Confucianism. However, it is critiqued to be an eager effort "to fill the moral void left by the decline of communist ideology and rising materialism across all levels of the society" (Wang 2016). It is not an excessive statement. Founded in a time of war, Confucianism set standards of moral conducts from individuals to social and political areas to restore social order and state authority (Yao 2000). For the rest of the world, it is a means for the government to project China's soft power as the nation's post-reform economic growth gains political influence internationally (Wang 2016). Regardless of the communist party's political agenda, it is undeniable that Confucianism is the foundation of the Chinese cultural tradition and still influences the lives of the Chinese people today (Chang 2013; Fan 2000; Hofstede and Bond 1988; Hofstede 2001; Mitter 2008; Yau 1983).



### 3.2 An Introduction to Confucianism

To introduce Confucianism, I begin with telling its origin and background. The founder of the school of Confucian thinking is Kong Fu Ze (孔夫子), renamed and now known as Confucius. His teachings built the foundation for the Confucian morality, individual identity, social structure, and world view. Confucius began to gather a group of disciples and devoted himself to political life in around 500 B.C., a period also known as Spring and Autumn Period (722-481 B.C.) in China. The Spring and Autumn Period was an era of turmoil and divisions. The divisions began when the lords of the previous dynasty, Zhou, rose up and claimed themselves kings in different regions as a result of the weakening power of the Zhou sovereignty. Lords rose and fell, lands were occupied and lost, and battles continued for hundreds of year. The fall of the teachings of ceremonial rituals and the instability of the times during the Spring and Autumn Period gave rise to the establishment of private schools and different school of thoughts. Confucius was one of the founders of private schools and thinkers of new philosophies. The era Confucius lived in had an impact on the Confucian world view. Confucius was dissatisfied with the corruption of social order, and the violation of the rituals formerly followed during the Zhou dynasty. Thus, his thinking and teaching were much fueled by his vision to restore rituals, social order, and stability in an era of war and divisions (Mitter 2008).

The moral system of Confucianism outlines the beliefs and virtuous conducts in the social and daily life of humanity. Confucianism is argued to be not only a moral system but an ethical system that has multiple moral dimensions of society, politics, education, and religion (Yao 2000, p. 32). The core of Confucianism is self-cultivation and moral improvement and perfection. The ancient Confucian text of *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) captures this connection and outlines the steps of achieving orderly peace in the world (Goldin 2010). To cultivate oneself and to improve his morality, one starts with acquiring knowledge, having sincere intentions and will, and rectifying one's heart. Thus, one educates oneself with *rujiao* (儒教), the doctrine of Confucianism, and internalizes the Confucian virtues to develop character. Then, once being consistent with one's inner being to external behaviors, one can

regulate his family, bring order to his states, and bring peace and harmony to the world (*Ritual Records* as cited in Goldin 2010).

Thus, learning is the foundation of a moral perfection process. This moral perfection process consists of balancing character and virtuous practices and becoming a man of virtuous ideal, translated as gentlemen (*junzi* 君子) (Mitter 2008; Yao 2000). Confucius's teachings include many virtues as documented in *The Analects* (*Lunyu* 《論語》), a collection of Confucius's conversations with his disciples and a classic source of the philosophy compiled by the disciples after his death. Confucian ethics require the Five Regulations that are also five virtues: benevolence or humaneness (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and faithfulness (*xin* 信). Among the virtues, the foremost emphasis is the virtue of humanness or benevolence (*ren*) (Huang 2014; Lee and Chi 2013; Yao 2000). Benevolence primarily concerns the human relationship between individuals. It reflects on one principle of self-practice<sup>1</sup>: treat others as you would treat yourself (Goldin 2010; Yao 2000). This principle is the virtue of reciprocity (*shu* 恕) put forth by Confucius to further explain the realization of humanness. However, as Goldin (2010) argues, the virtue does not defy the social relations as defined by Confucianism— one acts and treats others according to one's social role in relation to the other. Lee and Chi (2013) give an account of how a man should act in interpersonal relationships with others: being loyal and respectful to his master and father, being truthful to himself, and being loving to his children. From this, we can also see the social roles and relations defined by Confucianism, as the Five Human Relationships (*wulun* 五倫).

The Five Human Relationships (*wulun*) established the moral hierarchy and the underlying social structure embedded in Confucianism. These relationships and social roles are father-son, husband-wife, governor-subordinate, older-younger siblings, and friend-friend. The social roles define one's behaviors in the given relation. Mencius, one of the most influential Confucian thinkers and Confucius's disciple, noted:

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<sup>1</sup>Confucius's disciple, Zengzi, and the famous Confucianism scholar from the Song dynasty, ZhuXi, explained that the way of loyalty (*zhong*) and reciprocity (*shu*) is consistent with the way of humanness (*ren*) (see Huang 2014). Goldin (2010) and Yao (2000) also posit that *ren* premises on the principles of *zhong* and *shu*. However, they have slightly different interpretation on *zhong*: Goldin (2010) explains that *zhong* is "being honest with oneself in dealing with others" (p. 17) while Yao (2000) interprets *zhong* as being loyal to others, helping others to achieve what the other wants to integrate oneself with others (p. 214).

*Between father and son, there should be affection. Between governor and subordinate, there should be righteousness. Between husband and wife, there should be division of labor. Between older and younger siblings, there should be order. Between friends, there should be trustworthiness (Mencius as cited in Huang 2014)<sup>2</sup>.*

This passage illustrates how one should regulate his interpersonal relationships and follow the Confucian moral code and responsibilities. It is believed that the Five Human Relationships (*wulun*) signify a superior-inferior hierarchy and an intimacy-distance dimension that have their foundations on the social construct of the society (Hwang 1999). Hwang (1999) interprets that one who assume the role of the superior should follow the principles of kindness, gentleness, righteousness, benevolence in each social role while his counterpart must follow the principles of filial duty, obedience, submission deference, loyalty to his superior<sup>3</sup>. An individual should also favor people with whom one has a close relationship with, respect those who are superiors, and act as defined in the established social norm (Hwang 1999). Thus, it is acknowledged that individuals can be cold toward strangers whom he has not relationships with (Yau 1983). This, in part, results from the cultural conduct of making favors (*renqing* 人情) which are a part of building interpersonal relationships (*guanxi* 關係). I will discuss this in the next section.

As evident in the Five Human Relationships, three out of five relations have to do with family. The process of moral perfection does not stop within oneself; one should spread it outward to regulate family, and bring social order and peace to the world. (*Ritual Records* as cited in Goldin 2010). As a result, Confucianism values family as the root of self and the basis of achieving moral perfection in the external world. Mencius stated:

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<sup>2</sup> The excerpt is translated by me directly from Chinese to English. The translation is referenced upon Hwang (1999) and Park and Chesla (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Hwang's interpretation and translation stemmed from the book of *Li Chi*: "What are the things which humans consider righteous (*yi*)? Kindness on the part of the father, and filial duty on that of the son; gentleness on the part of the elder brother, and obedience on that of the younger; righteousness on the part of the husband, and submission on that of the wife; kindness on the part of the elders, and deference on that of juniors; benevolence on the part of the ruler, and loyalty on that of the minister. These are the ten things which humans consider to be right." (p. 169)

*There is an enduring adage among the people; they say: 'The world, the state, the family.' The root of the world is in the state; the root of the state is in the family; and the root of the family is in the self. (Mencius as cited in Goldin 2010)*

Family is the miniature of the society and the reflection of self. As I have reviewed earlier, the Confucian self is to be virtuous under the social roles and responsibilities defined in the Five Human Relationships. Family is the basis of sustaining order and peace in the society and the state. If attaining family relations reflects all the other social relations, the virtue of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) exemplifies the importance of learning and practicing moral lessons in the family to be prepared for the complexity of the world (Goldin 2010).

Filial piety (*xiao*) had existed for long before Confucian philosophy. In the earlier times, *xiao* meant piety toward the spirits of the deceased parents and ancestors (Yao 2000). However, in the texts of *The Analects*, *xiao* is referred to as mostly attitudes toward living parents (i.e. filial piety) resulting from the development of Confucian humaneness (*ren*) (Yao 2000). Confucius saw filial piety as the root of virtue that starts with serving one's parents. As a start, a son must not harm or destroy himself for parents bring hair, skin, and oneself to the world (*Canon of Filial Piety* as cited in Goldin 2010). Thus, oneself should naturally appreciate and respect one's parents. Serving parents also means to provide sufficient food and clothing with respect, but that is only the basic level of filial piety. A Confucian thinker, Zengzi, described the other two higher levels being: to not to bring disgrace to parents through failure (mid-level); to honor and glorify parents by one's achievement in moral perfection and one's service to the state (Yao 2000). Although filial piety thinking does not claim ownership of the self entirely to parents, it does engrave the existence of self and self-achievement to the practices of the family. Tu, Hejtmanek, and Wachman (1992) describe that the relations with parents continue long into one's adulthood. Reinforcing the social hierarchy, one is dependent on parents even as adults today.

### 3.3 Chinese Cultural Values

The review of Chinese cultural studies focuses on the value and belief systems within the cultural framework proposed by Sojka and Tansuhaij (1995)<sup>4</sup>. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Confucianism is an ethical system. It is reasonable to focus on the value and belief systems to be aligned with the scope of this study.

Adopting the value-orientation model (Kluckhohn and Strobeck 1961 as cited in Yau 1983), Yau (1983) has set forth the Classification of Chinese Cultural Values. Yau's (1983) classification premises that the traditional value of Confucianism still plays a salient role in the Chinese society despite political and social changes that have taken place in China. Thus, it is evident that the cultural values of "group orientation" and "respect for authority" are rooted in Confucian thinking (Yau 1983).

On the one hand, Yau (1983) has argued that the Chinese family and kinship system contribute to the group-oriented value. The family and kinship system is regarded as the basis for relating to others. In his effort in re-examining Chinese cultural values, Fan (2000) classifies group orientation under the category of "family/social orientation" under which filial piety, kinship, hierarchical relations are labeled. Both scholars emphasize on family ties and kinship reflect the Confucian value that sees family as the prototype of society and that gentlemen (i.e. ethical man) should foremost establish relations at home to keep the society in order. However, the rapid economic growth and modernization in China have put family value under challenge (Faure and Fang 2008). It is, for example, more common to sacrifice family life to make career choices (Faure and Fang 2008). Also, the divorce rate has increased (Faure and Fang 2008). Although these changes bring about challenges, they do not defy the long-term social value and behaviors of the Chinese society (Leung 2008). Family and group orientation remains of importance in modern China (Faure and Fang 2008; Leung 2008).

On the other hand, the values of respecting the authority and group orientation are influenced by the Five Human Relationships (*wu lun*). As described in the previous section (see 3.2. *What is Confucianism?*), the five relations specified that an ethical man should

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<sup>4</sup> Sojka and Tansuhai (1995) group marketing research on culture into three stream: 1) values and belief systems, 2) material culture and artifacts, 3) language and communication systems.

conform to the norms of superior versus inferior prescribed for each relation. This has led to the Chinese being respectful to their superior (e.g. their teachers, parents, and boss) as well as being group-oriented—behaving harmoniously toward others and maintaining long-lasting ties with others. Beyond the five social relations, there exists a wider network of social ties (*guanxi*) in the Chinese society. Hwang (2001) posits that Confucian ethics provide a guideline for *guanxi* and doing favors (*renqing*) that are acted out in the social interactions today.

As the social dimensions of the Chinese cultural value are recognized to be ground in Confucianism, the indigenous concepts affecting social behavior and the interpersonal relationship are developed and discussed. These concepts include “social face (*mianzi* 面子)” or “moral face (*lian* 臉),” “interpersonal relationship (*guanxi*),” and “favor (*renqing*).” While *guanxi* is shaped by the hierarchical network of social ties, *renqing* is performed under the obligation of reciprocity in the network (Hwang 1987). The process of acting out *renqing* is a mechanism to influence people and conform to the other’s will during social interaction (Hwang 1987). In the process, the person enacting *renqing* also negotiates the obligation through evaluating the maintenance of his or her *mianzi* and judging the nature of *guanxi* with the other person (Hwang 1987). *Mianzi* can be, thus, gained as the ties in the *guanxi* also weaken or enhance (Yau 1983).

An individual’s *guanxi* network is usually based on family, friends, and also people from work. Academic interests in *guanxi* mostly focus on its managerial implications as China’s economy has been soaring in the past decades (Arias 1998; Lee, Pae and Wong 2001; Leung et al. 2005; Xin and Pearce 1996). For corporates and new businesses alike, *guanxi* is a prerequisite to doing business in China (Arias 1998). Although building relationships and doing favors is not unique to Chinese culture, it is relied on by business executives to connect with the Chinese government officials and get protections from unstable conditions (Xin and Pearce 1996). The lack of government control and coherent commercial law exhorts the use of *guanxi* to succeed in business in China (Lee et al. 2001; Xin and Pearce 1996). The use of *guanxi* results in the intertwined relationship between *guanxi* and corruption (Luo 2008; Xin and Pearce 1996). Scholars still see *guanxi* as a positive social resource for businesses. Scholars often suggest a pragmatic strategies build *guanxi* with Chinese partners: gift-giving (Xin and Pearce 1996), establishing trust by using psychological commitment and caring

attitude (Lee et al. 2001; Leung et al. 2005); resolving conflicts (Leung et al. 2005), and limiting opportunistic behaviors (Lee et al. 2001).

Confucianism has persisted through time and political shifts and remains relevant in today's culture in China. As discussed earlier, the social behaviors and interactions that are outlined by the Confucian ethical system set a guideline for the *guanxi* network and social exchange of *renqing*. This type of discussion usually revolves around doing businesses in China while studies on consumers concentrate on how cultural values influences or shapes consumption behaviors. Next, I will examine the literature on the relationship between Chinese cultural values and consumers.

### 3.4 Chinese Consumers and Face Consumption

There have been great interests in the consumer market in the People's Republic of China (PRC) due to China's transformation toward a consumer society. Many have argued that the cultural dimension of "social face (*mianzi*)" underlies materialism (Filleir and Lin 2016; Podoshen, Li and Zhang 2011; Sun and D'Alessandro and Johnson 2014; Zhou and Belk 2004), customer satisfaction (Hoare and Butcher 2008), gift giving (Joy 2001; Qian, Razaue and Ken 2007), and wedding ritual (Nguyen and Belk 2013). Here, it is important to note the difference between social face and moral face (*lien*). While the loss of moral face can evoke the feelings of shame or guilt, the loss of social face concerns more with social comparison and peer pressure. However, most of the studies develop their argument based on the social face, *mianzi*. In the next paragraphs, I review face consumption, referring mostly to *mianzi* and then briefly discuss the moral face.

Face consumption, defined by Li and Su (2007), is "the motivational process by which individuals try to enhance, maintain, or save self-face, as well as show respect to others' face through the consumption of products" (p. 242). That is, people can gain face through material possessions (Sun et al. 2014) as well as maintaining social relations with others through consumption practices (Joy 2001; Sun et al. 2014; Qian et al. 2007). They clarify that face consumption is different from consuming to increase one's status for two reasons. First, not all

face consumption is intended to show off. Second, face consumption can serve the purpose to show respect for others' face, not always one's own face. Indeed, maintaining face in interpersonal relationships is important in Chinese societies, especially in situations when there is a superior-inferior duality. For example, when having dinner with a group, the person who is of superior position, e.g. a manager or a senior person is expected to pay for the whole group or bear the risk of losing social face, i.e. *mianzi*. However, face maintenance also happens between peers. In Joy's (2001) study, her respondent explained that forgetting to give gifts to one's friends can cause losing *mianzi* to acquaintances while it also causes losing one's moral face, i.e. *lien*, to her close friends.

Maintaining a social face has been found to affect desire and behaviors of Chinese consumers'. Through analyzing responses of television and print advertising, Zhou and Belk (2004) observe that consumers' desire for "global cosmopolitanism and status goods" comes from seeking *mianzi* as the notion of "anything Western" symbolizes success. *Mianzi* is also found to drive the repurchase decision of smartphone brands (Feilleri and Lin 2016) and influence conscious consumption (Podoshen et al. 2011) among young Chinese adults. Moreover, materialism and *mianzi* are found to have a positive relationship (Sun et al. 2014). However, despite empirical evidence in *mianzi* driving material possessions and endorsement for "Western-ness," it is argued that other Chinese cultural values should not be abandoned (Wang and Lin 2009; Zhou and Belk 2004). Fine elements of Chinese culture, such as filial piety, care for family and respect for the elderly still created strong emotional positive images from Zhou and Belk's (2004) informants. Wang and Lin (2009) also argue that Chinese society is increasingly seeking "cultural renaissance" in which the traditional values are considered to be incorporated in the context of globalization.

The Chinese culture values are oriented toward interpersonal relations and hierarchy (Fan 2000; Yau 1983). Thus, face consumption is a social obligation due to its social meaning (Li and Su 2007). In social exchange rituals such as gift giving, it is not simply an instrument of seeking *guanxi* networks that usually occurs in building business relations, but a ritual that establishes strong personal connections (Joy 2000). The concerns for these strong personal connections go beyond *mianzi* and reciprocity (Joy 2000). Joy (2001) point out that reciprocity is found to be discouraged in family and family-like contexts, such as between close friends.



Thus, the moral face, *lien*, is concerned in these contexts. However, there is a lack of studies on these close personal connections. As a result, *lien* has not been studied extensively and has rarely been separated from *mianzi* in consumer research (Nguyen and Belk 2013).

### 3.5 Summary

This study aims to understand how technology consumption manifests Confucian values and social structure in the context of Chinese family viewing television and videos. In serving this purpose, I give a contextual account on the Chinese philosophy of Confucianism and the Chinese culture.

Despite political and social changes throughout the thousand-year history in the state of China as we know it today, Confucianism, a school of philosophy that is founded around 500 B.C., is still deemed to be an influential force in the everyday life of a Chinese person (Fan 2000; Hofstede and Bond 1988; Hofstede 2001; Hwang 2001; Mitter 2008). It has an impact on moral and value systems, social and political structure, and essentially, on what it means to be an ethical human. The Confucian moral system was founded on the notion of self-cultivation, internalizing Confucian virtues, and behaving accordingly. First and foremost, an individual needs to be benevolent toward others, i.e. the virtue of *ren*, and “treat other as you would treat yourself” (Goldin 2010; Yao 2000). However, not everyone is to be treated the same because an individual’s behavior is dependent on his social role. Confucianism advocates following the prescribed role and interacting with others to restore social order. This defines the social structure and relations an individual must maintain: father-son, husband-wife, governor-subordinate, older-younger siblings, and friend-friend. These relations are also known as the Five Human Relationships (*wulun*). Among these relationships, family is considered to be the miniature of the society, and thus, a man should cultivate good family relations and respect filial piety, i.e. the virtue of *xiao*.

The influence of Confucian virtues and the Five Human Relationships shapes the Chinese cultural values. The collectivistic nature of Chinese society has its origin mostly from Confucianism. The Chinese cultural values, such as family and group orientation and

respecting authority, affect the notion of building social ties within an extended network of social relations (*guanxi*) and, for example, the way to do business in China (Arias 1998; Lee, Pae and Wong 2001; Leung et al. 2005; Xin and Pearce 1996). In the meantime, social relations also induce the identity work of creating, maintaining, and respecting “social face (*mianzi*)”; that is, one’s prestige, status, and reputation (Li and Su 2007). Different from the western culture, “face” work is not always about showing off and that sometimes it is extended to others to maintain social relations by respecting others’ face (Li and Su 2007). Other than “social face,” there is also the concept of a “moral face (*lien*).” The moral face work is found to be influenced by strong social ties, such as family and close friends in consumer research (Joy 2000; Nguyen and Belk 2013). These closer connections and the moral face are less studied.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to understand how television and video viewing in Chinese families substantiated Confucian values and social structure. To understand consumer experiences in the research context, I follow the traditions of hermeneutics. Specifically, the analysis and interpretation of the data were guided by Thompson (1997) to give an etic account of consumer meanings and to draw out the broader cultural and sociohistorical framework. Altogether eleven interviews were conducted using the format of phenomenological interviews to obtain descriptive consumer narratives as lived (Thompson, Locander, Pollio 1989). In Section 4.1, I give more detail account of the research approach. In Section 4.2, I unravel the data collection and analysis process as well as explaining the linguistic differences between Mandarin Chinese and English and how they affect the translation of interview excerpts.

### 4.1 Research Approach

This research is qualitative and interpretive in nature. The methodological objective is to obtain descriptive accounts of consumer “lived experiences” (Thompson et al. 1989) in the domain of television and video viewing in Chinese families. The study follows the traditions of hermeneutics (Thompson 1997) to understand consumer meanings. The approach allows the researcher to pursue the cultural and sociohistorical background in consumer narratives (Thompson 1996). Thus, I obtain, analyze, and interpret consumer narratives of their lived experiences from in-depth interviews (Thompson, Pollio and Locander 1994; Thompson 1997).

In-depth interviews help the research gain understanding of contextual details of consumption experiences and get a thick description guided by the information supplied by the informants (Husdon and Ozanne 1988). Consumer stories facilitate seeking consumer meanings of the “lived experiences” that are created through interactions and contexts. As a result, consumer stories of past events or behaviors provide a prime source for analysis. This is

because the descriptive text derived from consumer stories enables the researcher to document and seek recurring patterns (Thompson 1997).

## 4.2 Data Collection

This research uses phenomenological interviews to acquire knowledge of consumer stories and their lived experiences (Goulding 2005; Thompson 1997). I follow the guideline of phenomenological interview proposed by Thompson et al. (1989) to generate texts of consumer stories and the meanings emerged from them. Phenomenological interview enables the emergence of certain events and behaviors from the consumption experience expressed by the informants (Thompson 1997). Here, consumer stories and narratives are the prime sources of for seeking recurring patterns and interpreting “meaning units” that construct a holistic view (Goulding 2005; Thompson et al. 1989).

In total, eleven consumers were purposefully sampled based on their background then they were interviewed in person. The interviewees were recruited with the help of a friend and a coworker living in China. The recruited interviewees were all native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, living in China. Table 2 shows the profiles of the informants. I conduct the interviews during a one-week trip to China. To gain in-depth and descriptive narratives, I conducted the interviews in Mandarin Chinese which is also my native language. Additionally, there were three follow-up interviews conducted via Internet calls. The aim of the follow-up interviews was to probe more into certain description given in the first ones.

There were few pre-planned questions for the interviews. At the beginning of the interview, I informed the interviewees of the research topic and asked pre-planned questions find out their demographical information, what electronics they owned at home, and what devices they use to watch online video. Then, I asked the question, “*Please describe the last time when you watch online videos*” to bring out the stories of their experiences. The interviews then follow the course of the conversation with me acting as an active listener, probing when specific topics arise and asking follow-up questions.

While phenomenological interviews are open-ended, I have specified interest domains to guide the interviews. These interest domains include emotions, everyday life, social interactions, and relations. When these issues are brought up by the informants, I ensued with questions. However, if the topics did not arise, I asked questions aiming to get a description of the experience concerning the domain. For example, when it came to emotions, I asked, “*Is there a time when the videos or TV emotionally influenced you?*” or “*What emotions do you have when...?*”

The lengths of individual interviews range from 50 to 90 minutes. The interview recordings were later transcribed into texts in Mandarin Chinese verbatim. Excerpts that are critical to the emerged themes were translated into English.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Who do they live with?</b>	<b>Data collection method(s)</b>
Cynthia	27	F	Husband	In-person and phone interviews
Helen	28	F	Boyfriend	In-person and phone interviews
Jenny	30	F	Boyfriend	In-person and phone interviews
Jessica	42	F	Alone	In-person interview
John	36	M	Wife	In-person interview
Julia	22	F	Landlord (in a shared apartment)	In-person interview
Linda	39	F	Husband and kid	In-person interview
Sandy	28	F	Husband, kid, parents, grandparents	In-person interview
Susan	39	F	Husband (kid lives with her parents)	In-person interview
Tricia	24	F	Parents	In-person interview
Webber	38	M	Wife and kid	In-person interview

Table 2. Informant Profiles and Data Collection Methods

## 4.3 Data Analysis

### *4.3.1 Analysis strategy and process*

In analyzing and interpreting the interview texts, I follow the traditions of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics approach entails a methodological process in which the interpretation of data follows a “part-to-whole” iteration (Thompson et al. 1994). The goal is to find recurring patterns in the narratives of consumer stories of their everyday experiences. These stories provide the main source for interpreting their personal meaning evoked by the past that forms their narratives structure (Thompson 1997). Thus, I follow Thompson (1997) by first reading through the interview transcripts individually at multiple times to understand each case in depth. During the later readings, I follow these steps specified by Spiggle (1994). First, I classified and labeled texts in each interview that can be named about the phenomenon studied, i.e. categorization. Second, the chunks of texts or keywords were developed into more abstract concepts, i.e. abstraction). Third, I analyzed the data across interviews to compare and contrast emerged units and themes, i.e. intertextual comparison.

Follow-up interviews were conducted during the categorization and abstraction phases and the analysis process was repeated. This analysis process was, as Thompson (1997) suggested, time-consuming because a holistic understanding must be developed over time (Giorgi 1989 as cited in Thompson 1997). I also explored and revisited literature related to the phenomenon and the emerged themes while repeating the former analysis steps to gain a quality understanding of the background and to guide the analysis of the data. The emerged themes from the data initially seemed to point to different scenarios in which informants watch television and their motivation related to life situations. After iterations of analysis, reviewing literature, and consulting thesis supervisors, I narrowed the focus on the social relationships of the informants and analyzed the underlying social constructs in the context to arrive at the themes and findings presented in the next chapter.

#### 4.3.2 Linguistic difference and translation of interview excerpts

The interviews were conducted in a shared native language, i.e. Mandarin Chinese, so verbal communication and comprehension was fluent between the informants and me. The interview excerpts presented in the findings were translated from Mandarin Chinese to English. During the translation process, certain linguistic differences had affected the translated outcome. The main goal of the translation is to reflect the narrative and to make semantic sense. The excerpts were not translated into perfect English since it does not serve the goal. I point out one major difference between the two languages<sup>5</sup>.

There is no grammatical specification of tense in Mandarin Chinese. Whereas a story told in English can be recognized as something that happened in the past e.g. “*I was watching TV when...*” or as a fact, a habitual practice e.g. “*I watch TV every night,*” a story in Chinese does not make such distinctions. For example, “*I was watching TV last night when...*” in English can be expressed as “*I watch TV [last night], and...*” If the time “last night” was not specified, the receiver can only judge whether it is a past event or a general statement through pragmatic markers. The ambiguity in Chinese affected their narratives. Often, informants may mix both past events and habitual practices together. In Jessica’s narrative, we can see that she did not answer the question with a specific past event:

*Interviewer:* Can you please describe how it was like back then when you and our friends were watching Japanese Sumo matches together?

*Jessica:* This is a bit like hosting a party, but more like a family, a family party. So [people who] come are close friends. It is not like those big parties where everyone can come and that some people are unfamiliar [to me]. So everyone [her close friends] has a Sumo player he [or she] likes. Everyone has someone they like. And then, we just chat with each other, eat, and share [our opinions and thoughts]. It is a sharing process.

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<sup>5</sup>: Some examples of other differences in which Mandarin Chinese does not distinguish: differentiation in gender in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular pronoun, i.e. he and she; singular and plural noun forms, e.g. dog versus dogs. However, these differences are minor. They do not lead to confusion or misguide the translation. It is easier to spot and to be translated.

In the question defined the event using the word that means “when” or “back then” (當時) in Mandarin Chinese. However, Jessica answered not by describing a certain event that happened in the past, but by making a general statement about the kind of a party she usually hosts. One could argue that she misunderstood the question or chose not to answer the question directly. I only aim to point out here that such ambiguity arises due to the lack of tense in the Chinese language, which can easily lead to temporal misunderstanding. There were also other examples of mixing past events and general facts. Nonetheless, the linguistic difference pointed out here did not affect the informants describing or recalling their experiences. The issue with temporal misunderstanding was resolved by comprehending, analyzing, and translating the texts based on the contexts in the narratives and on my judgment. Interview excerpts were translated into English in a way that makes semantic sense.



## 5 FINDINGS

I present the main findings from the empirical data in this chapter. This chapter is divided into four sections. First, in Section 5.1, I explain the meanings of television and video consumption expressed by the informants and the consumption patterns in the family settings. Then in Section 5.2, I reveal the tensions in the parent and child relationship and how they conform to the moral influences to manage these tensions. In Section 5.3, I examine the relationship between husband and wife, uncovering the tensions, how power dynamics is maintained, and how informants seek autonomy from the power structure. Lastly, I present a framework of the sociocultural structure in the Chinese familial relationships and summarize main findings are summarized in Section 5.4.

### 5.1 Television and Video Consumption in Chinese Families

#### *5.1.1 Defining television and video consumption*

Watching television and using smartphones or tablets to watch online videos are almost inseparable in informants' narratives. When I used the term "television" in interview questions, the answers were not limited to the physical television screen at home nor to the traditional television programs that are broadcasted via cable television. Alternatively, if I used the term "online videos (線上視頻)," informants may answer using the word "television (電視)" instead. To the informants, the meaning of watching television is the act of viewing movies, series, or variety shows from a television or a mobile device. Informants used the term "television" interchangeably as they talked about watching online videos from a tablet or mobile phones. Sandy's narrative exemplifies this use:

*Interviewer:* Please describe your experience when you watched an online video last time.

*Sandy:* Basically, I watch television alone. The person next to me doesn't really want to watch [what I watch]. And... I usually watch on an [mobile] app. But if I don't pay,

there are still some televisions [shows] I can watch, but there are very long ads [that are displayed before the video starts]. (...) Lately, some people recommended me a WeChat (social media app) account to follow. So I don't have to pay [for the mobile app to watch online videos without ads]. You can watch from that [WeChat account].

*Interviewer:* How did those people recommend it to you?

*Sandy:* They noticed that I was watching television. So they told me, "You can follow this [WeChat] account. You don't have to pay [for watching online videos] if you follow it. And there are no ads. The resolution [of the videos] is good.

Even though I asked about Sandy's experience with "online videos," she replied by referring to it initially as "television." Later on in her responses, it was evident that "watching television" to her is similar to using a mobile app to watch videos on a tablet. She also used the word "television" to refer to movies or series she watches using the app.

Sandy's narrative shows that the meanings of "television" and "online videos" are closely related to her. That is also the case with most of the informants. In some other informants' responses, they may have a newer kind of television screen at home, an Internet television, which is also called a smart TV. Simply put, an Internet TV is a television screen that has the capability of connecting to the Internet, something that traditional television screens lack. As a result, using Internet TVs or other Internet-connected devices to watch movies or shows is a technologically similar concept to watching traditional TV. As a last note, watching television may also mean watching a movie from a DVD disc. It, however, only applies to one informant.

The blurred line between the various meanings of "television" used in the informants' speech is not the same when it comes to how they perceive the technology of traditional television and the Internet television, i.e. Internet-connected TV that can stream online videos. Most of the informants acknowledged the differences and showed a clear inclination toward the later. The Internet television is described to be "more convenient," to have "more functional choices" and that it makes it possible to overcome time constraints, and ultimately

gives more control. Webber explained how he thinks a smart TV is better than a traditional one:

*Webber:* I can watch TV based on my schedule. To me, Internet television can be arranged by myself. If [I had a] traditional television, I am the one being arranged. This is the biggest difference.

*Interviewer:* Is there something more?

*Webber:* There is one more difference for me. I can choose the types [of content] I like. For example, when I watch [television] with my kid, I will choose to watch movies or series in the English language. (...) This is an extra benefit he (his son) gets from watching television. So I can easily choose [from Internet TV] types of shows for him to watch.

Webber's narrative indicates that he ascribed the meaning of control over time and choice to television. The technological capability of an Internet TV gives him control whereas the traditional TV does not. Television appears to be agentic in the consumer narratives in which the Internet helps gain more agency.

The scope of this research is to investigate the underlying social constructs in the context of television viewing in families. It is, however, not relevant to narrow the context to either television or video viewing from either a technological or a theoretical point of view. In Section 2.2 *Television and video consumption*, I discuss literature on both television and video consumption, paying attention to the consumption of content and its practice. Hence, when the two phrases are mentioned in the remaining part of this chapter, I do not distinguish the two and follow the meaning expressed in the narratives.

### *5.1.2 Television and video viewing in the family setting*

Television and video viewing are mundane in the informants' everyday lives. It is not surprising that almost all informants' watch something, whether television programs, movies

or series as videos. Most of them watch television at least three times a week, if not every day. The interviews also show that the informants seem always to have a screen “on” in the house. Thus, television and video viewing in the family occurs in different contexts.

First, informants all described that they watch television at home, usually movies or TV series, when there is “nothing to do” or when there is “free time.” When there is free time after dinner, they usually just sit down, choose what to watch, and eat some snacks in the living room. Or, for the informants who live with their parents, they usually watch television from their bedroom after dinner time. However, the notion of having “nothing to do” or “free time” is weighed against the other priorities perceived by the informants. Work duties usually emerged in their narratives as the top priorities even when they are off work. John described how he needs to respond to work messages when he is watching television at home:

*John:* If some people send me messages [via a mobile messaging application] to ask about price, ask about work things, I don’t want to watch too difficult things [like crime series]. Because I might need to reply messages every 5 minutes. So I am more willing to watch TV with more complex stories when I can get rid of work.

*Interviewer:* How is it like when you can get rid of work?

*John:* [It is] when my clients are not bothering me; my boss is not asking me questions; my clients are not urging me to give them documents. I think this is the difference between the work lives in China and abroad. Abroad, personal time is when you are off work. So normally your clients and bosses will not disturb you [when you are off work]. In China, you are always in work mode with your mobile phone at hand.

John’s description discloses that it is culturally acceptable to bring work home in Chinese work life. Television watching is his way of relaxing when he can load off the pressure of being responsive to his clients or boss. Also, John indicates that this state of affecting what type of content he chooses to consume.

Second, most of the informants have the television or their tablet on when they are having a meal. For example, the TV is usually on in the background, e.g. in the living room,

playing the evening news. Alternatively, a tablet is put on the dining table, playing a series while they are eating. A few informants said that their families have meals in the living room right in front of a TV. The informants' families "sit around the TV and eat" (Sandy, 28), "have all the dishes ready on the table, sit down, and take out the iPad" (Cynthia, 27), or "chat, eat, and watch TV at the same time" (Tricia, 24) during dinner time. Watching television has become a dinner ritual for these families. For informants who do not watch television while eating and usually on purpose, they still engage in watching it after dinner or later in the evening.

The mundane activity of watching television is different from other home activities, such as doing house chores or making dinner. Television watching is an activity in which every member of the same household does engage. Contrary to that, doing house chores and making dinner are household duties and responsibilities which fall upon only one or few members. The others may rarely or never practice these duties. Thus, watching television provides a good context to investigate the social construct in Chinese consumers' lives with their close connections, such as families.

## 5.2 Television and Video Consumption in Parent and Child Relationship

### *5.2.1 Tensions in filial relationship*

The parent and child relationship in Chinese culture seems to be a constant push and pull. The parents have their expectations of their sons or daughters as they go through different life stages, urging the child to follow directions that meet the parents' expectations. In the meanwhile, the parents seek to pull their children closer to them as the resulting tensions between them dramatize in the process of parents pushing force. The children also find themselves in a similar situation. They pull themselves away to pursue the social ideal life encouraged by parents but also pushing themselves back to their parents to fulfill their duty as sons or daughters. A child's relationship is dependent on their parents even during his or her adulthood (Tu et al. 1992). This dependent relationship comes from the social structure and moral system that are emphasized in Confucian thinking and in general, Chinese culture. From

both parent's and children's stories, I give accounts to the tensions in the parent-child relationship from both parent's and children's stories elicited from the interviews.

The Chinese parents expect a lot from their kid. The expectations Chinese parents put on their kids include finding a good job and achieving social status, by attending a highly ranked university, and by getting good grades at school. The role and expectation of a parent are best seen on Webber. Webber is a parent of a teenaged son. His wife and son had moved from his hometown to the city center of Changshu to live closer to the high school his son attends. He expressed his frustration toward the education system in China that is "dominantly putting much pressure on the kids." The pressure comes from getting good grades at school and at entrance exams to be admitted to good high schools and universities.

Under such competition, the students have to fight for limited spots in those schools by attaining the highest grade points possible in high school and entrance exams. Webber thought that the idea of attending good schools comes from parents' thinking: "First, you have a good degree or knowledge. So you go to good university and study a good major. Relatively speaking, it is easy for you to find a job." However, what is a good university or a good degree? A good school is one that everyone wants to get in. A good school with a good reputation could open doors to various career options; a good occupation is one that the parents and the society perceived to be prestigious.

Following such a social norm enhances not only an individual's social face, *mianzi* but also one of the families (Nguyen and Belk 2013). For example, being a teacher is considered to be a profession of high status. This is evident in Chinese thinking in that Confucius is the ultimate teacher and the sage in education (Yao 2000). So, the teachers are seen as superiors whom people should respect. Webber made an example that parents may say to their kids, "When you grow up, you should become a teacher," putting their wishes for the children first.

Aside from parents' expectation to achieve academic success in school, parents also have expectations of the children's career achievement and life choices. The female informants who are not married expressed the tension between parental expectation and their life situation. For the daughters, their marital status and their age concern the parents.

Tricia is a single female with an office job who lives with her parents. Living with parents as an adult is socially accepted in Chinese society. All of the female informants live with their parents or had lived with parents until they got married or relocate to another city for job opportunities. Unlike in Western societies, Chinese teenagers who are over 18 years old do not necessarily have to move out or face the social pressure to move out. The discourse on living with parents does not contain negative meanings. However, regarding the discourse on marriage, Tricia described that in her city “everyone will think that nobody wants you” if a female reaches the bottom line age of 30 years and is unmarried. Naturally, 24-year-old Tricia carries her parents’ expectation to get married soon and to start building her own family.

Informants who live in a different city far away from their home city express such tensions resulting from being away from parents. For Julia, she experiences tension between her moral beliefs of being filial obedient toward her parents and her pursue of better and more career opportunities living in another city. Helen also has a similar situation. She also has struggled to adhere to morality, but the tensions pull her further away from her parents, both physically and emotionally. She and her parents have had arguments about her moving out. Helen moved from her home city Nanjing to Shanghai city to pursue her better career path. Her parents were not supportive of this decision. She said that they did not believe in her and that they had arguments and fights over this until they gradually accepted her life in Shanghai independent of them. However, she feels distant toward her parents since they live a different city and different lives. The root reason is that what her parents want the best for her is not what she wants for herself. She started to make life decisions by herself, including moving in with her boyfriend in Shanghai. This decision, however, has been kept a secret from her parents since they do not accept it. The independence she gained from moving to another city that is unapproved by the parents and unorthodox of the societal expectation created tensions between them.

### 5.2.2 Conforming to filial norm and duties

Under the tension in the filial relationship, the informants use the consumption of television and videos to mediate the relationship and mitigate tensions. Through this, they are able to comply with the norm while maintaining morality as the role of a parent or child. In this subsection, I observe that television consumption is used for parents to maintain filial intimacy while following the social norm and send their children to better universities. To the children, television and video consumption mediate tensions between being filial obedient toward the parents and being independent, pursuing self-interests.

As a parent, Webber is obviously frustrated by the norm, but he chooses to conform. He expressed his struggle to empathize with the kid and let him “develop himself fully, not just getting highest grades,” but at the same time wishing him to adapt to the competitive environment. Thus, he tries to always be there with him by supervising his homework and preventing himself from watching television on weekdays. It came up when he described his daily routine:

*Webber:* (...) At around seven [in the evening], I accompany my kid while he is doing homework. Of course, he starts doing homework after dinner. He doesn't watch TV. Sometimes he finishes homework earlier, like at nine, he gets everything done. Then I will allow him to watch television. (...) Between Mondays to Fridays, there is only time for me to watch television with him. No time for watching television by myself. Because this is a request coming from the school teacher: Parents should share the ups and downs with the kid (laugh). Because if you are watching television while he is doing homework, it may foster his feeling to rebel.

Webber's narrative indicates that he conforms to the norm, putting the same expectations to his son and following the school teacher's recommendation. However, he recognized the tension of being a father who tries to build emotional connections with a teenaged son:

*Webber:* When kids enter high school, it is when they enter the rebellion phase as a teenager. As a parent, I don't overly discuss with him about what's on TV; he will feel repulsed and say something like “Can't you watch it by yourself? Don't you



understand?” Of course, I can play like a fool and say, “Why is it like this? Why is it like that?” and he will go, “You are so annoying. How come you don’t understand this?”

*Interviewer:* How did you feel when it happened?

*Webber:* I think it is quite normal because that’s how I was like [when I was a teenager]. I can understand that [rebellion]. To be frank, as a parent, we want to connect with kids, and sometimes you find whatever topics to talk about, random topics.

Besides at the dinner table where they exchange conversations about “how their days went,” watching television enables Webber to seek intimacy with his son extendedly. He used the television content as topics, deliberately “playing a fool” and asking his son questions about the plot showing on the television. Television screen and the movie or series showing on it become a medium of fatherly love toward the son.

At the same time, the choice of what to watch on television is purposeful. The most common choice is the popular American series *Friends*. Webber explains that the school teacher recommends watching the series to learn English and cultivate an intuition of a native speaker. Thus, the television content also serves as a medium to uphold the expectation from father to son, to succeed in life.

It is noteworthy that, to Webber, his son’s rebellion is not resisting authority, but fighting against intimacy with the parent. Webber’s son still does homework every day and even on the weekends as expected from Webber and the school teacher. We can interpret that rebellion stays within the boundaries of the Confucian father-son relationship. An act that defies authority would be, in Confucian thinking, non-virtuous.

As a single female and a daughter, Tricia faced pressure from both the societal and parental expectation to get married before 30 years old. At the age of 24, Tricia’s life goal was to advance in her career first. She spent her weekends preparing for an examination to acquire a certificate of her profession. Her parents sometimes use television programs, e.g. match-

making shows to bring up the topic and urge her to get married. The misalignment between Tricia's own goal and her parents' expectation, however, is well hidden. While her parents use television programs as an opening for a discussion on the topic of marriage, Tricia uses television to hide her silent objection: "Television can be a background noise, so it is not so awkward [when I respond with silence]." Both sides seem to be trying to avoid conflicts, stirring and avoiding conversation using the existence of television programs. Television provided a means to maintain harmony, and for Tricia to be filial obedient toward her parents and not to evoke conflicts.

For some other parents, an unmarried daughter living together with a male partner, instead of a husband, is a bigger issue, also taboo. Helen's story demonstrates that. As narrated in the previous subsection, Helen has a distance relationship with her parents that started from her moving out and away from her parents and eventually hiding the truth about living together with her boyfriend. However, Helen tries to help their parents out and spend some time with them when she visits her parents. She always helps fix their problems with electronics, goes out shopping with her mother, pays for her mother's online shopping orders, eats and watch television together in the evenings. However, she described that she does not usually go shopping or watch certain television shows. These are the activities she does with her parents, especially with watching television:

*Helen:* When I was living in Nanjing, I would not intentionally watch TV series with them (her parents). But now when I go back, I may watch TV with them intentionally. I think this is a feeling... the feeling of doing something together. Anyway, they do not have to be very focused, so we can just randomly chat.

*Interviewer:* What do you mean when you said, "intentionally"?

*Helen:* Because I don't like to watch series about the Second Sino-Japanese War [the type of series preferred by my mother]! So I would not choose to watch that if the choice was mine. Anyway, they wouldn't watch the movie or series I would choose. So... [I intentionally watch TV with parents].

Watching TV with her parents and by her mother's choice became an intentional act after she moved to Shanghai. Her feeling of doing something together by watching TV and chatting compensates their lives apart. Moreover, her following the mother's decision on what to watch makes up for the lack of her parents' involvement when making decisions. She would also defend this time to fulfill her intended purpose. She would tell her father not to complain if he would comment on the TV series since the main purpose is just to stay together.

Television and video viewing is a gateway for the informants to sustain filial piety. Besides Helen, Julia also moved away from her home city, Guangdong, to Shanghai city for work. Her life in Shanghai revolves around work and no social life. As a newly graduate, she constantly reflects on improvements she can make at work and actively learn from her colleagues. Unlike Helen, she does not experience conflicts between her and her parents when she moved out. However, she still experiences struggles between pursuing a work life and spending time with parents. This internal struggle prevails especially when she spends television time with them. She particularly described the feeling of guilt:

*Julia:* The time I spent at [my parents'] home is very short and the time I spent with them is also short. So if I go upstairs [to my room] to do my things, I will feel sorry and guilty toward them because I don't fulfill my duty of filial piety (xiao 孝). As the saying goes, "You should not go to a place far away when your parents are alive. (父母在不遠遊)" So my guilt comes from this old thinking. (...) Although the show on the television is quite boring, I still feel embarrassed to leave [my parents watching television by themselves].

Julia went to boarding school since 13 and lived in the university dormitory. So the guilt intensifies for having not lived at home for a long time. Similar to Helen, she intentionally stays to watch television with her parents to compensate for her guilt of not spending time with them. The quotation she uses is from the Confucianism epitome, *The Analects*, which documents the conversations between Confucius and his disciples. The full quote goes, "While the parents are alive, you may not go or travel to a place of distance. If you do, you must have a fixed place to which you go. (子曰：父母在，不遠遊，遊必有方。)" Confucius advised his disciples not to travel far away from parents for the reason that from a faraway place, a

child is not able to serve one's parents. Although Julia said that it is an old way of thinking, she has internalized the notion of filial piety and is influenced by the conscientiousness to serve her parents.

## 5.3 Television and Video Consumption in Husband and Wife Relationship

### *5.3.1 Tensions in marital relationship*

Tensions between husband and wife or between cohabiting partners lie in the maintenance of power dynamics. On the one hand, the decision making for choosing television or video content reflects the power dynamics. It is evident that the subordinate one in the relationship succumbs or compromises to the other. On the other hand, the superior one in a relationship would request for a commitment of time and set up protocols to cultivate togetherness through shared television and video viewing. The request, although perceived by the other partner sensible, imposes a restriction on them at the same time. I present the interview data and explain more the two types of tension in this subsection.

In the relationship, television choice often reflects power dynamics between couples. It is conventionally deemed that the male in the family is the dominant one. It is noticeable in John's story. John and his wife both have a busy work life. Their weekends usually find a common time to watch television together only on the weekends. It is a time when they can choose a movie and watch it together at home. From John's description of how they discuss deciding on a movie, it can be seen that he put his judgment over other factors:

*John:* We first check if there are new movies or series [on the video streaming service] that we haven't watched. If there's none, we will maybe choose from our preferences, types... For example, she will start to look for horror and thriller ones. When she finds something, she will ask me, "Do we watch this?" I will ask her one question, "What is the rating? If the rating is too low, then don't." If it's anything lower than a 7, don't bother. Those are really lame I care more about... You tell me first what the rating is, I then decided if I will watch it.

How John reacted to his wife asking his opinions on certain movies indicates John's sense of superiority of his standards over his wife's preferences for horror movies and thrillers. The power dynamic between him and his wife is clearly demonstrated in his narrative.

One interview, however, shows the opposite of superior-subordinate roles. Sandy and her husband have a rare, but not unorthodox, marital relationship. They and their 3-year-old child live with Sandy's extended family, including her parents and grandparents. Unlike the traditional Chinese notion of marriage, Sandy's husband "married" to Sandy and her family. It means that instead of being named after the surname of the father, the child follows the mother's surname. Moreover, instead of the wife moving in with the husband's family and see the family as her own, e.g. calling husband's parents "mother and father," serving husband's parents as if they are her own parents, the husband does that. The power dynamics ensued by the marital arrangement is subtly revealed in their decisions on television viewing:

*Sandy:* I don't like that there are several people fighting for one iPad or one television. This sometimes happens. For example, my husband sometimes wants to watch a movie on the iPad, but I am usually occupying [and using] it. So he cannot watch [it at that time].

*Interviewer:* How do you "fight for" the television or iPad?

*Sandy:* It's not literally "fighting" (laugh). It's... for example, our kid wants to watch an animation [on the television], and I am using the iPad. So he can only watch an animation with him [the kid]. But he usually gets upset and goes to the living room to watch the television there.

Living with extended family in the same household, they spend time in their bedroom as the common family space instead of the living room. They usually go back to the bedroom after having family dinner and watch content on television and on iPad in that space. In her narrative, the iPad is sometimes a preferred choice for watching movies mostly because there are more choices available than on their cable TV. Sandy's husband who is in the position similar to a wife and lives with Sandy's family did not seem to have negotiation power. Her husband does not really "put a fight" or negotiate on the ownership of the iPad.

As described in John and his wife's story, they choose and watch television together when they have common free time on the weekends. For other informants, they also cultivate togetherness by watching television or videos together and committing to the process of choosing, watching, and discussing the content. The process starts with choosing a movie to watch at home together which indicates one person's effort in creating the intimate space and time. For most of the informants, what the movie is about is irrelevant. Watching movies is about the sharing of time and space at the moment of being together. For the others, watching movies together creates shared memories or conversations.

Here, Helen who is living with her boyfriend described how she thinks that watching a movie or series "a sharing of time and being together":

*Helen:* Watching a movie together is not just about at the moment. You will have more common topics [to talk about] and a discussion after watching a movie. And maybe he [the partner] feels that watching a movie is a way of sharing, sharing of time. After all, we both go to work and don't really spend the day together so he thinks we should do something together. So he will ask me to find some series that I like so we can watch them together. Or, sometimes he will watch something, like those zombie series, by himself since I don't really like those. But he will ask that I choose something I want to watch so we can watch together.

Watching movies together at home creates the feeling of togetherness for Helen and her boyfriend. The togetherness is in contrast to the separate time they do not share at work. To make it up, they watch movies or series together to create that togetherness, a sharing of time and intimacy and extend the intimacy through discussing movies.

In her narrative, the idea of "doing something together" was initiated by the boyfriend. Thus, it is not surprising that her boyfriend also asked them not to be distracted by other things when they are together. One, her boyfriend asks Helen not to use her mobile phone to browse the Internet or reply to messages while they are watching a movie. Second, the boyfriend can even be upset if Helen falls asleep during a movie:

*Interviewer:* Why would he feel upset [at you falling asleep during a movie]?

*Helen:* Because he feels that watching a movie is a thing between two people, a common activity. Maybe many people would feel upset about this... I don't know. I just think that it doesn't matter if I fall asleep.... That happened several times. He usually gets upset. [When that happened,] I just told him that the movie was too boring. He then would let it go.

This excerpt illustrates that Helen's boyfriend would also request Helen not to fall asleep during a movie. Helen first tried to rationalize this by assuming that many other people would react to the same like her boyfriend. Then she revealed her slight disagreement over this, indicating that she claimed her autonomy in this. For Helen, all the rules that come with cultivating togetherness by watching movies together seemed to be something outside of her normal practice but taken for granted or rationalized by her.

### *5.3.2 Conforming to marital power dynamics*

Between husband and wife or long-term partners, it is common to see that the subordinate one in the household compromises to follow the decision made or protocol set by their partner. The informants who compromise to their counterparts rationalize their conformity or their desire to break the protocol.

Susan's narrative illustrates the stereotypical husband and wife relationship. Susan is an office worker and has a 2-year-old baby. She is very much busy with work and taking care of her daughter. She goes to work at seven in the morning and gets home at six in the evening. Having limited time during her weekdays, she entrusts her daughter with her parents and travels to her parents' place every night to spend time with her. Her husband is even busier. He spends half of his weekday evenings having dinners and socializing with his clients or colleagues. The absence of her husband is perceived as a normal and necessary for his career. Susan naturally takes on the duties of child care and housework. Her narrative shows that she is "responsible for taking care of" her daughter every night while her husband was barely mentioned when she described her activities with the daughter.

The activities Susan engages at home are mostly house chores while her husband engages in television watching. Although she sometimes spends time on watching television, she always gives control of the television to her husband. Through television watching, Susan comprises her choice over to her husband and rationalizes this decision:

*Susan:* I sometimes watch it with my husband... But I spend maybe half of the time watching television by myself. We don't watch the same thing. If he occupies the television, I can only use an iPad. He likes to watch American series which I don't like. I like to watch Korean series. If he wants to watch American series or American movies then I let him watch on the television. I will use the iPad. Basically he doesn't like to watch Korean series. Guys are not interested in watching what females like.

*Interviewer:* When was the last time you watch television together?

*Susan:* Last week, I was watching a football match with him. He was sitting on the sofa, and I was hanging the laundry. This is pretty normal. In the end, our football team [the Chinese national team] lost.

*Interviewer:* How is it like when you are watching from iPad, and your husband is watching television?

*Susan:* Basically he watches more television at home. I am usually doing house chores when he watches television. Well, he watches more television because he doesn't need to do house chores. He helps me hang some clothes at most (laugh). And... the screen of the television is big. Those American series he watches are suitable for a big screen, so I let him watch them on the television, and I watch [Korean series] on the iPad.

In her narrative, Susan first indicated that doing house chores is her duty alone. Even when they were watching television "together," she was primarily engaged in house chores. The football game showing on the television was what her husband likes, not her. She made sense of her letting the husband watch on the bigger screen because of the content type. Here, the television seems to be a desirable choice over iPad because of the screen size. In Susan and her husband's relationship, the husband is evidently the dominant one even when it comes to



the mundane activity of watching television. Susan's narrative did not show that it is the husband's demand, rather, it is Susan's internalization of the feminine role that makes her compromise. Such a strong inclination is not necessarily evident in other informants, but the choice of what to watch and who gets to watch on television outlines the relationship dynamics between husband and wife, or between two cohabiting partners.

Another informant, Jenny lives with her boyfriend and works as a freelance artist. She mostly works from home and also takes care of the cleaning and making dinner in the household. To the couple, watching movies at home is a routine of their lives. Both love watching movies, they always move from the dinner table to the living room couch and asked each other, "What do we watch today?" However, Jenny and her boyfriend have made agreements not to watch television at dinner. They follow this rule strictly:

*Jenny:* My boyfriend and I follow the principle of not watching TV while dining. So for us, dining is dining. We dine on the table and make an effort not to watch TV... No, [I don't mean] making an effort. It's more like we are not allowed to. Sometimes I feel weird... or uncomfortable [not to watch TV while dining]. I will want to watch something. My boyfriend insists strongly on this: we only eat when eating. We cannot use our smartphones or anything. Only eating.

*Interviewer:* How do you feel weird?

*Jenny:* I don't know... just feel like I want to watch something. Maybe it's a habit like I want to watch TV or watch some other things while having dinner. Like, I was watching Money Monster (a movie) when I was having dinner at home. I was home alone yesterday, so... there is nothing to do. I thought I could watch a movie. But this is actually not a good habit. When I was in Taiwan [living with parents], we would get scolded at if we do so. But now if I am alone, then it's okay. I feel kind of free that I can watch TV while eating (laugh).

Jenny regarded watching television and having dinner at the same time a bad habit under the influence of her family and her boyfriend. From her description of how her boyfriend thinks about having dinner, we can infer that having dinner together also embodies a sharing of time

and creates togetherness between them; same as watching movies at home. Her narrative also indicated that she continues following the rule of not watching television at dinner time under her boyfriend's insistence. However, this restriction makes her feel "weird," perhaps a sense of restriction from enjoying the act of watching television while eating. Although Jenny said that it was maybe a habit for her, she later mentioned that it is a rule in her parents' house as well. It is doubtful whether she had formed this habit if it had been a taboo since her childhood. Nonetheless, by terming the want to break the restriction as "a bad habit," she could rationalize her wanting to break free from this restriction.

### *5.3.3 Relieving from marital power dynamics*

In marital relationships, the informants make efforts in creating a shared time and togetherness through watching movies or series at home. Informants who live with their partners face certain restrictions when watching television at home. They often need to compromise their choice or are not allowed to do other things related to watching television. These restrictions imposed in their household make them seek autonomy to be able to do what they want when they are alone. Informants express senses of "enjoyment," "freedom," and being "unrestrained" when they can watch television by themselves.

As we seen from Jenny's narrative in the previous subsection, her boyfriend whom she lived with did not want them to watch television while having dinner. Jenny did follow this rule as an effort to commit to their relationship and togetherness. However, when she would be alone at home, she would "free" herself from this rule and satisfy her want to watch TV while she is having dinner.

In a similar situation, Helen also gains a sense of enjoyment when her boyfriend was not with her, telling her not to use a smartphone during a movie:

*Interviewer:* Can you describe a time when you are watching television at home alone?

*Helen:* At home alone... Basically I was lying on the bed and watching non-stop. It's more enjoyable (laugh).

*Interviewer:* What do you mean?

*Helen:* Well, not really enjoyable... actually I am more immersed in the story when I'm with my boyfriend because he doesn't let me use my smartphone in the middle [of the movie or show]. But if I am watching by myself at home, I will check my phone if there is a message coming in. If he is by my side, he will say, "You need to focus." So I think it is a bit different... I am more at ease when I am watching alone.

Although watching movies or series together is a way of sharing intimacy for them as a couple, the restriction of not being able to check her phone makes it liberating to watch movies alone and do what she normally cannot do. Not only is checking the phone prohibited, talking too much or falling asleep during the movie also makes her boyfriend "impatient" or "upset." However, to maintain the togetherness in their relationship, she follows these rules while her boyfriend also compromises by letting her choose what she wants to watch or watch a movie again if it is a title she has not watched before. Thus, watching television alone without any compromises can be "more" enjoyable to Helen.

However, having the tradition of not doing so does not bring guilt than liberation. The liberation does not cause the loss of the moral face (*lien*), rather, it is a relief from the constraint that causes internal conflicts. It is clear that the informants talked about not watching television while having dinner or not doing anything else when watching a movie as restrictions imposed by their boyfriends. While they do not oppose to them, the informants compromise their individual wants, but internally seek individual freedom and autonomy.

## 5.4 Summary

In this section, I answer the research question and present the Confucian values and social structure in the context of television and video viewing in Chinese families as illustrated in Figure 1.

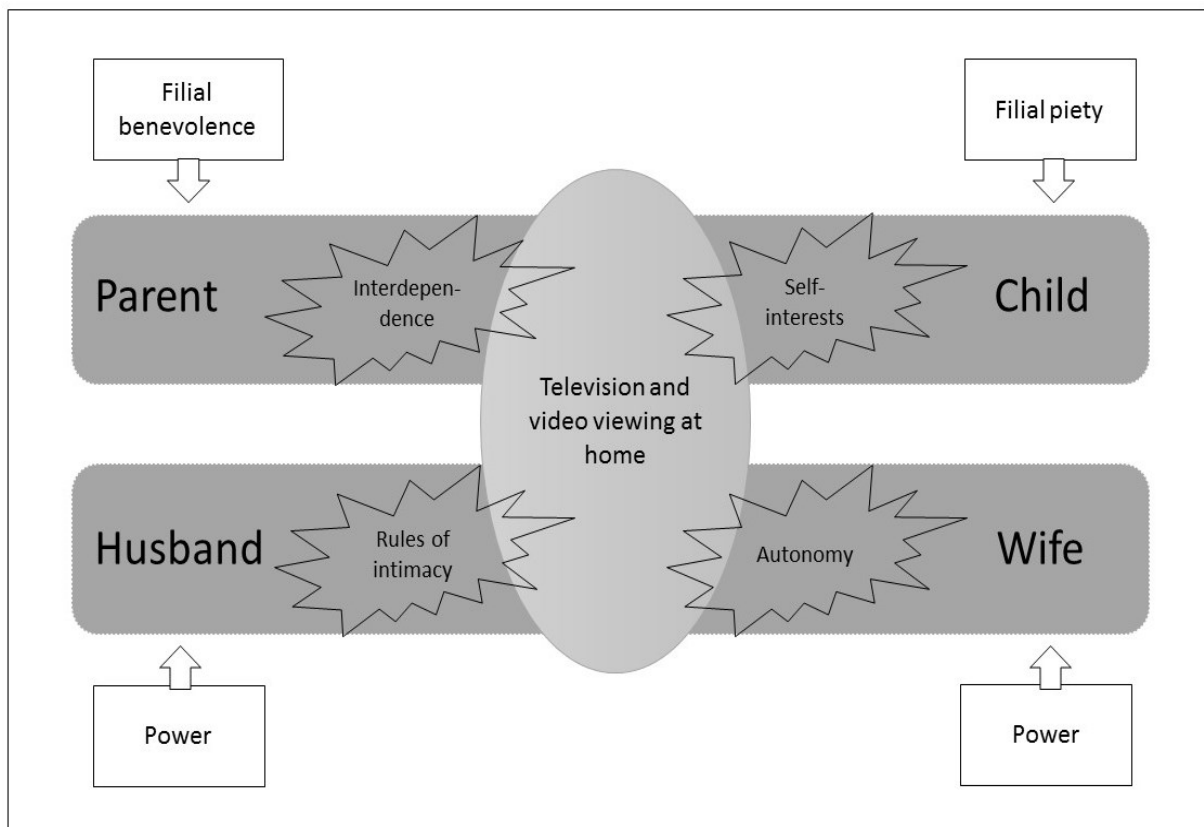


Figure 1. Sustaining Familial Relations in Technology Consumption

As revealed in Figure 1, Chinese consumers follow social propriety and mitigate tensions under the influence of different drivers in the dyadic relationships of parent-child and husband-wife. First, the tensions in a parent-child relationship arise from parents' wishes to maintain interdependent relationships with their children and children's wants to pursue self-interests. Such a self-interest may be pursuing career opportunities in other cities that keep

them physically away from their parents and sometimes emotionally, too. In this type of relationship, both roles are influenced by the Confucian ethics of being benevolent toward one's children, i.e. filial benevolence (*ren* 仁), and being obedient and serving one's parents, i.e. filial piety (*xiao* 孝). Second, the tensions between husband and wife or cohabiting partner are evident in the maintenance of power dynamics. In this type of relationship, the ones with less perceived decision power compromise their choices and conform to the rules during television and video viewing activity. Meanwhile, their counterparts cast their decision power and set up rules for the activity to create and maintain intimacy. However, the subordinate ones break out from the rules to regain momentary autonomy.

Next, I summarize the findings and explain in more detail the filial and marital relationships from the empirical data.

#### *Filial relationship: between parent and child*

Tensions between children and parents are twofold. First, parents expect to maintain an interdependent parental relationship with the children even when they have entered adulthood. Parents expect that their children would follow their wishes and meet their expectations. They also expect the children to follow the social norm that values competition, achievement, and status. However, parents struggle to keep the children under high pressure and constant competition, like in Webber's story. Webber experienced struggles between being a parent who aligns with social norms while being benevolent and empathetic toward his son. His empathy toward his son corresponds to the Confucian role of a father and the value of benevolence (*ren*). To Webber, watching television carries meanings of conforming to the social norm as well as seeking an emotional connection with his son. Through watching television shows, Webber's son can learn English from the shows to help the son advance his grade at school, i.e. following the norm. At the same time, Webber can spend time with the son, i.e. seeking an emotional connection. Furthermore, if the children do pursue achievement, such pursuing a good career path, tensions also arise due to parents' expectation to keep the children close. As seen in Helen's story, her parents disagree with her decision to move out.

As we have seen, finding a prestigious job is a common perception of enhancing moral face (*mianzi* 面子), both for the individuals and for the family (Nguyen and Belk 2013).

Second, the tensions from the child's side are rooted in pursuing self-interests as adults, especially career opportunities. The tensions arise when self-interests contradicts the parents' expectations to maintain an interdependent relationship and to have their daughter married within an acceptable age. Evident in the empirical data, Tricia and her parents have never openly talked about the different wants Tricia had for herself and what her parents wanted for her. Her parents utilize television programs to convey their wishes for Tricia while she uses the same tactic to avoid the conversation. The tensions between them are hidden delicately underneath the everyday interaction of television viewing. The intent to hide the tensions comes from the notion to maintain harmony and avoid conflicts in the family (Nguyen and Belk 2013). In Confucian thinking, a son or daughter should not "toil and complain" even when parents do not intend to mend their ways (Golding 2010, p. 28). This is not to lose one's filial respect. Sometimes the tension comes from within oneself. Another informant, Julia, has internalized the cultural value of filial piety and faced struggles to be close to her parents and to kick-start her career. The phrase quoted from *The Analects* demonstrates exactly where her struggle underlies. The situation is also demonstrated in the relationship between Helen and her parents. Helen's independence from her parents has caused clear tension. However, also fulfilling the duty of filial piety, Helen sweeps the tension under the carpet when she visits her parents. She mitigates tension by concealing her life changes and by spending time watching television together with the family.

#### *Marital relationship: between husband and wife*

Tensions in a marital relationship lie in maintaining power dynamics and a compromised autonomy to cultivate marital intimacy. The power dynamics is usually reflected when couples watch television together. The subordinate one compromises to watch watching television and videos from a less desirable screen and rationalizes the decision. Also, in making an effort to keep and enhance togetherness in a relationship, the counterpart with more

power usually sets up protocols for watching television while the subordinate follows the rules while seeking momentary autonomy when being alone.

For some informants, the choice of who gets to watch content on what screen also reflects the dynamics. In Sandy's family, the iPad is a more desirable screen at home because of the variety of choices for content. She could keep the iPad to herself, not sharing her husband. Her husband had no negotiation power over the use of the iPad or the use of the television when their kid would want to watch animations from it. Sandy's husband married to Sandy's extended family and integrated to her family instead of the other, more conventional way of having the wife marrying to the husband and becoming a member of his extended family. It was clear from the interview that Sandy has decision power over the use of the iPad. In another interview, Sandy took on the traditional role in the household of being a caretaker and a housewife. Although she is working full time, the responsibilities of doing house chores and taking care of the kid fall only upon her. Her husband does not share the duties. Susan always yields the television screen to her husband because the television screen was bigger and a more desirable choice to view content on than the iPad. When her husband watches the shows he likes, she will watch other shows from the iPad. Internalizing the feminine role, she justifies her decision to let her husband have the bigger television screen based on the content he preferred, e.g. American series, in comparison to her own preference for Korean series.

For some other informants, they regard television and video viewing as a process of cultivating togetherness as a couple. Togetherness is cultivated through watching the movies at home, discussing movies, and through having shared moments together in the process. Thus, the consumption of television and videos carries the meaning of creating intimacy between the couples. However, television and video consumption reflect their inner tension of conforming to the relationship protocol versus their individual wants and autonomy. Helen and Jenny follow the rules that are requested by their partners. The requests are about inhibiting certain practices when they were having dinner or watching television together. For example, Helen's partner does not let her use a smartphone when they watch a movie. He would also get upset if Helen falls asleep when they watch a movie at home. For Jenny, her partner strongly insists that they do not watch television when they have dinner. Helen and Jenny both behave by these rules. However, they also seek opportunities to emancipate themselves from these

restrictions. Although the rules they comply with help cultivate intimacy and avoid conflicts, they describe feelings of being free and unrestrained from doing what they want by themselves.



## 6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the key findings of this study and extend theories in existing literature of technology consumption. Several studies (Arnould 1989; Bonsu and Belk 2003; Joy 2000) have taken a cross-cultural approach and exemplified how “existing theories can be revised based on data gathered further afield” (Joy 2000, p.251). Similar to this approach, the present study extends the literature of technology consumption and sheds light on the embedded sociocultural structure in technology consumption patterns. The findings reveal the tensions between the dyadic relationships of parent-child and husband-wife in Chinese families and how these tensions are managed to maintain harmony and power dynamics in the relationships under the influence of Confucian social relations and ethics.

This chapter consists of three sections. In Section, 6.1, I argue that contrary to previous research, Chinese consumers do not experience paradoxes or possess contrasting ideologies in technology consumption. In Section 6.2, I suggest that technology consumption in Chinese families add a new dimension to Kozinets’s (2008) ideological fields of technology. In Section 6.3, I discuss how these findings extend current understanding of Chinese consumers.

### 6.1 Coping with Relationships, not Technology Paradoxes

The informants’ speech indicated that the Internet empowers them with more control and content choices. They did not express conflicting views or experiences that accompanied the empowerment. The main reason may be that most of the informants experience television viewing as a central family activity akin to having family dinner. This finding is not in alignment with the findings of Mick and Fournier (1998). Mick and Fournier (1998) find that their informants experienced a sense of freedom given by the increased choices, but also felt enslaved by them. Moreover, watching television is regarded to be both a hindrance between extended family members while it can also be a facilitator to social occasions (Mick and Fournier 1998). Rather than experiencing these paradoxes, the informants in this study see television and video viewing as a shared meaning of family bonding (Zhang 2009) and

intimacy. Using television and video viewing for bonding was seen in parent and child relationship. The parents watch television with their children and initiate conversations about the plot and their concerns and wishes for the children. The children often watch television with their parents to compensate for the lack of time spent with parents. For husband and wife or long-termed cohabitating partners, television and video viewing was seen by the informants as a shared activity to create and extend intimacy in their relationships.

Most often than not, television viewing is utilized as a vehicle to also cope with tensions between family members. Thus, technology consumption is conditioned to the social roles and the prescribed ethics of Chinese culture and specifically, of Confucian values. In previous research, scholars argue that technology ideologies can be categorized as technophilic and technophobic (Giesler 2012, Kozinets 2008; Thompson 2004). The technophilic view sees technology as a force for social, economic, and experiential improvement while the technophobic view regards technology to be detrimental to nature and that it alienates human from nature (Kozinets 2008). These ideologies premise on the Western myths of Utopia and Eden (Thompson 2004). The findings of this study unfold a technophilic view the informants espoused toward television and video consumption practice. However, technology consumption in the research context is rooted in the Confucian ethics and values of family and group-orientation (Fan 2000; Yau 1983). To sustain interpersonal relationships in the family and to maintain harmony, the informants consider television and video viewing as helpful in mitigating tensions and upholding Confucian values, such as filial benevolence (*ren* 仁) and filial piety (*xiao* 孝).

## 6.2 Achieving Harmony between Human and Nature in Technology Consumption

Under the sociocultural influence of Confucianism and Chinese culture, the findings indicate a new dimension to Kozinets's (2008) technology ideologies. To begin with, Kozinets (2008) proposes that the Techtopian view articulates the utopian society in which technology benefits human harmony and humanity in alternative places. The utopian articulation affected

the Gnostic mythos that further couples technology and science together with the development of the perfect state (Kozinets 2008; Thompson 2004). However, Techtopain ideology is often found in contrast with Green Luddite ideology in consumer studies (Kozinets 2008; Mick and Fournier 1998; Tian et al. 2014; Thompson 2005; Fischer, Otnes and Tuncay 2007). Green Luddite ideology views technology consumption as destructive to nature (Kozinets 2008) which is rooted in the Edenic myth of human alienation to nature (Thompson 2004).

Confucianism also promotes humanity and harmony in its theory of perfecting the state and society through self-cultivation (Mitter 2008; Yao 2000). However, Confucian humanity, i.e. the way of human, coexists with nature, i.e. the way of heaven and earth (Huang 2014; Yao 2000). The Confucian doctrine lays down the metaphysical view of the world that consists of Heaven (*tian* 天), Earth (*di* 地), and human (*ren* 人); the three harmoniously exist in parallel (Yao 2000). In Confucian thinking, nature, i.e. Heaven and Earth, stays eternally unchanged and human ought to live and act in the way of nature (Huang 2014). The way to achieve the way of nature is through achieving humanity, that is, through self-cultivation and learning that centralizes on the ethics of benevolence (*ren* 仁) (Huang 2014; Yao 2000; Goldin 2013). Thus, the world can achieve harmony and order through maximizing human potential and cultivate humanity (Yao 2000). That said, the Confucian relationship between human and nature is not contradictory.

Thus, the contrariety of morality between Techtopian and Green Luddite ideologies proposed by Kozinets's (2008) does not necessarily apply to Confucian societies and cultures. The use of technology to achieve social and moral goals exemplified in this study may initially seem to fit the Techtopain ideology. The human and nature relationship differentiates between the Western and Asian contexts and sets the findings apart from Kozinets (2008). Through technology consumption, the informants uphold the Confucian social structure to achieve interpersonal harmony and morality. In doing so, they also uphold the Confucian way of nature and maintain the traditions, instead of imposing threats to nature and tradition, as evident in the Green Luddite ideology. Thus, technology consumption in Chinese families is situated in the liminal space between the Techtopain and Green Luddite ideologies where nature and human betterment coexist.

### 6.3 Extending Understanding of Chinese Consumers

The findings of this study reveal the social and moral drivers of consumption and shed light on the consumer behavior studies in the Chinese context. In pursuing the Confucian ideal and social propriety, television and video consumption practices give the informants agency to fulfill ethics and sustain familial relations. Thus, they maintain an individual's moral face (*lien* 臉), a Chinese cultural value that is rarely studied in consumer research (e.g. Joy 2000; Nguyen and Belk 2013). The empirical data in this study complements Nguyen and Belk's (2013) harmonization processes in Asian families. Nguyen and Belk (2013) argue that the protection of family moral face from the moral judgment by members of the extended family or social groups promotes harmonization processes. On an individual level, the findings unfold the drivers that protect individual's morality and maintain harmony within the family. It is noteworthy that in Nguyen and Belk's (2013) findings, the informants in filial relations do not sacrifice their self-interests to moral conformity. Instead, they pursue their self-interests, but follow the moral code within their limits to balance independence and interdependence with their parents.

From the empirical data, I found that the female informants mostly were in the comprising role in a marital relationship in the empirical data. The Confucian husband-wife relationship does not clearly specify gendered duties and expectations. The husband-wife relationship is outlined in the Five Human Relationships (*wulun* 五倫) in Confucianism. It is suggested "between husband and wife, there should be division of labor" (*Mencius* as cited in Huang 2014). The Five Human Relationships also indicate the proper order between superior and subordinate: superior should act in benevolence toward subordinates and subordinates being obedient to the superior (Hwang 1999). Although the quote from *Mencius* implies an equal distribution of labor between husband and wife, Confucianism is generally deemed to oppress women in its patriarchal hierarchy (Li 2000). The core element of Confucianism does not oppress any gender in particular (Li 1994). It may be inferred that the gender stereotypes and power structures are rooted in a cultural framework outside of Confucianism. Future research can put more focus on gendered consumption in the context of Chinese culture.

## 7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I first summarize and state the theoretical implications in Section 7.1. Then, I discuss the limitations of this study as well as implications for future research in Section 7.2 and 7.3 respectively.

### 7.1 Research Summary

Previous research lacks understanding of the sociocultural influences on technology consumption and how technology manifests Confucian sociocultural framework. Furthermore, studies reveal the technology ideologies are rooted in the Western mythoi of Gnosticism and Romanticism (Thompson 2004). This study addresses the gap and makes visible the cultural values and social structure in the context of Chinese families.

This study extends existing literature on technology consumption in the stream of Consumer Cultural Theory (CCT). First, the study sheds light on sociocultural influences and structure embedded in technology consumption patterns in the Chinese context (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Second, the findings showed that Chinese consumers do not experience technology paradoxes (see Mick and Fournier 1998) or contrasting ideologies in technology consumption (see Kozinets 2008; Tian et al. 2014; Thompson 2005; Fischer et al. 2007). Third, I argued the Confucian worldview of human and nature be in opposition to Western discourses, and it defies Kozinets's (2008) contrariety of morality between Techtopian and Green Luddite ideologies.

To draw out emic accounts of Chinese consumers viewing television and video at home, I conducted phenomenological interviews (Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1989). It allowed the researcher to gain descriptive accounts of the informants' "lived experiences" (Thompson et al. 1989). I conducted eleven interviews in Mandarin Chinese, the native language of both the informants and myself. The interviews lasted 50 to 90 minutes each. A hermeneutics approach was followed in the analysis process to understand consumer meanings

with the perspective of personal history and the broader cultural and sociohistorical frame of reference (Thompson, Pollio and Locander 1994; Thompson 1997).

The findings revealed that the informants seek to fulfill ethics, to mitigate tensions, and to sustain familial relations with parents, children, or a significant other through television and video consumption at home. The findings proclaim that the informants mostly conform to the social role that is prescribed to them and fulfills moral or social duties. The informants utilized television and video viewing to manage and mitigate the underlying tension between the informants and their counterpart in the parent-child and husband-wife relationships. However, some of the informants also temporarily broke free from the marital rules in their relationships with their partners.

## 7.2 Limitations of the Study

The study is interpretive in nature. Thus, the findings of the study are subject to the context and the interpretation of the researcher (Husdon and Ozanne 1988). Being culturally Chinese and raised in Chinese society, I served as an instrument in interpreting the data and foregrounding the cultural elements in the research process. The interpretation and conclusions drawn were referenced upon my cultural framework and prior knowledge in the research context. Alternative interpretations and perspectives for the research topic would bring interesting discussions to light.

The sociocultural structure and values in the context of television and video viewing in Chinese families were presented in this study. However, focusing on family relationships is limited to a fraction of the social structure in the Chinese societies and does not include the other Confucian relations, i.e. governor-subordinate, sibling-sibling<sup>6</sup>, and friend-friend. Joy (2000) sets forth friendship, and gift-giving continuum in the Hong Kong Chinese context, yet gaps remain in comprehending elements of institutional structure, Chinese culture, and technology consumption.

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<sup>6</sup> China enforced a one-child policy from 1979 to 2015 (BBC 2015). It would be challenging to collect empirical data of relationships between siblings in China.

This study also has methodological limitations. First, all eleven interviews were conducted within the timeframe of one week in two cities in China. There were one to two interviews scheduled each day in various locations. Under time constraints, there was not enough time for the researcher to reflect and revise the interest domains of the interviews to iterate the research process multiple times. Although there were three follow-up interviews, rather they were insufficient to gain more descriptive texts. Conducting at least five more follow-up interviews would have been ideal. Second, to further study the social interactions in the family settings, some ethnographic investigation would complement the data and perhaps reveal more tensions and related coping mechanism in families.

### 7.3 Implications for Future Research

The present study suggests three directions for future research. First, the empirical data is limited to the construct of familial relations. More research attention should be given to investigating the relationship between technology consumption and broader institutional structure beyond family ties.

Second, the findings indicated that technology consumption was utilized for social and moral improvement. As discussed in Section 6.2, the Confucian worldview revolves around attaining humanity to achieve ultimate harmony between human and nature. The Confucian relationship between human and nature suggests that there would be no contrasting ideologies between social progress and natural destruction in technology as Kozinets (2008) proposes. Future research could explore technology consumption in Chinese discourse as well as in other cultural contexts.

Third, the findings illustrated that there were instances of both males and female taking the more dominant role in the marital relationship. Although females mostly assumed the non-dominant role, there lacked theoretical foundation supporting that Confucianism promotes masculinity or femininity in genders as discussed in Section 6.3. More research attention should be given to gendered consumption in Chinese societies and influences from Confucianism.

## APPENDIX

### Glossary of Terms in Mandarin Chinese

English	Mandarin Pronunciations (in pinyin)	Mandarin Characters
Kong Fu Ze	<i>Kong Fu Ze</i>	孔夫子
The teachings of Confucianism	<i>rujiao</i>	儒教
virtuous man; gentlemen	<i>junzi</i>	君子
<i>The Analects</i>	<i>Lunyu</i>	《論語》
benevolence	<i>ren</i>	仁
righteousness	<i>yi</i>	義
propriety	<i>li</i>	禮
wisdom	<i>zhi</i>	智
faithfulness	<i>xin</i>	信
reciprocity	<i>shu</i>	恕
Five Human Relationships	<i>wulun</i>	五倫
making favors	<i>renqing</i>	人情
interpersonal relationships	<i>guanxi</i>	關係
filial piety	<i>xiao</i>	孝
social face	<i>mianzi</i>	面子
moral face	<i>lian</i>	臉
when; back then	<i>dangshi</i>	當時
online videos	<i>xiangshang shipin</i>	線上視頻



television	<i>dianshi</i>	電視
(Confucian) Heaven	<i>tian</i>	天
(Confucian) Earth	<i>di</i>	地
human	<i>ren</i>	人

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